







(THE MYSTERIES
OF
THE MOGUL COURT)

BY

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THE
The Mysteries of the Mogul Court

CHAPTER I.

EMPEROR'S CAMP.

The long expected impending war broke out. So long the apprehension of imminent danger was weighing down the minds of the citizens of Agra and Delhi and all people, young and old, inhabiting that locality. The mysterious murder affair of Delhi, the more wonderful, blood-curdling incident of Fatehpur Sikri,—all these events had so much captured the imagination of the people that the news of the breaking out of immediate war was too heavy a blow for them to bear.

War was not an unusual event in those days we are speaking of—in some part of this great Indian continent war of some description existed at all times, and the horrors and miseries incidental to it were ever present. In this more peaceful age we have an idea how terribly the country was affected by it,—the life of the poor peasants were considered no better than straw, and those who could escape the severity of plunder and pillage took shelter in the wilderness with their wives and children, leaving their poor houses for ever. The

ethical code of war did not then attain that perfection, and, as a matter of consequence, at the end of the war, the victorious soldiers let loose upon the innocent and inoffensive people, and had no scruple of conscience. Plunder, pillage and ravages were every-day incidents in those days. Though this was the order of the day, the locality of, and around Delhi was comparatively immune from the ravages of war. Even we can safely say without fear of contradiction that the district of Agra and many parts of the country were enjoying peace for the time being, as Jahangir the Emperor used to pass his days in pleasures and amusements, giving himself up to drinking almost day and night and had no time to waste his energies in warlike adventure. Moreover there was no immediate necessity of his being dragged into war, as the haughty and unruly chiefs of Rajputana had already acknowledged his suzerainty. Indeed the people of that district were happily passing their days without being interrupted in their daily advocations of life ; but they were fully familiar with the horrors of war. Now the declaration of war filled their mind with utmost consternation, and the entire population—rich and poor, young and old, passed their days in a sense of insecurity and fear.

A peculiar novelty and extraordinariness marked the proceedings of this war. Unlike the ordinary wars of those days, it was a war between the father and the son, between the brother and the brother ! The people would

have understood the situation much better if the Emperor had been obliged to fight with a foreign enemy for the defence of his country who had invaded the country and was about to wrest the throne from him, being actuated by the lust of insatiable conquest. But the nature of the present war had invested itself with a sense of peculiar horror, as none of the numerous subjects of Jahangir had the least idea, that he would be able to extricate himself from the fascinating charms of luxuries and personally march towards the battle-fields. There was no doubt that the situation was extremely grave. That something unprecedented, undreamt-of, had happened, and at such everywhere there was this one talk,—this one topic of conversation.

None of them was acquainted with the main causes which led to this fratricidal war. They suspected that there was some connection between the murder incident of Delhi, and of the supernatural ghostly affair of Fatehpur Sikri. Their mind was oppressed with the suspicion that everything was indissolubly connected with the machinations and intrigues of the royal harem. But a veil of hazy mysteries shrouded the whole affair and the people by no means could unfathom its root. Everything was a sealed book to them.

Now all doubts had been removed, and the horrible war had actually broken out. The Emperor Jahangir himself marched at the head of the army, and these news spread like wild fire all around. The inhabitants of Agra, to their sense of utter bewilderment, gazed at the

military procession with the pleasure-loving Jahangir marching at their head upon a richly caparisoned elephant with all the pomps and magnificence due to his regal position. Nurjahan, that incomparable queen, followed her lord with innumerable *Baudis*. Amid this horrible, but glorifying scene, the position of Prince Shariyer was indeed lamentable, He was on the back of an elephant. His whole countenance indicated that he had not the heart for the work which he had undertaken, that the whole thing had been thrust upon him against his wish and that like a doll he was moving. The principal streets and thoroughfares through which the Emperor had to pass were lined with innumerable spectators. For the edification of our readers, and more for the sake of truth, we should say that the disolute King was even then drinking to his hearts' content and his regular attendant was constantly serving him in a golden cup with the best wine available.

It would tax our utmost effort to give or rather to attempt at giving a correct idea of the magnificent procession which followed the Emperor. Innumerable palanquins or Tanjams of various descriptions covered with rich satin, embroidered with gold, carried within them the best beauties which adorned the Begum Mahal of the Mogul Emperor with their necessary luxurious appendages. Even the best dancing girls of the time were ever present in the battle-fields with the Emperors.

The Emperor Jahangir pitched his camp near Fatchpur Sikri. It was made of the finest shawls of Kashmere

and in every respect as gorgeous and magnificent as it could have been. The royal flag, crescent in form, was waving over the camp creating awe and reverence in the minds of the people. Beautiful flower gardens suddenly appeared round the camp, as if by some unseen magical power. Big bazars grew up round it, and the sellers and customers from different quarters of the country made their appearance. A regular big town seemed to have sprung up all of a sudden and the sweet, sonorous voice of those beautiful damsels spread a charm all around. Thus the horrible, and hideous character of the battle-field was utterly eliminated. Indeed one loses himself in contemplation when he sees before him thousands of soldiers marching towards the battle-field, perhaps many of them never to return, have abandoned themselves to music and merry-making, utterly oblivious of the consequences that awaited them. Who can tell that two days after this beautiful pleasure garden will not be a scene of horrors and lamentations, washed by the stream of blood of those, now given to licentious merriments?

But very few of them could know what they were fighting for, and with whom they were to measure their strength. There were wild rumours circulated about this matter. They heard that Shahajada Parbesh was marching towards Rajputana with a vast army under his command. They also heard the rumour that the indomitable Bhim Singh of Marwar was determined

to place Shahajada on the throne, and that in this bold attempt, he was to be supported by that invincible General, Mahabat Khan, who was the mighty pillar of the Mogul throne. Their combined army were marching towards Agra, but the mystery of the whole affair was heightened by the fact that the object of this gigantic undertaking—Prince Khurum was not to be found anywhere! None could enlighten the public as to the whereabouts of Shahajada Khurum. They were not even positive as to his existence in this world? In those days, when life and property were most insecure, everybody entertained the gravest doubt as to the very existence of the prince. They could not in any way explain away the sudden disappearance of the Prince, except that he had been secretly murdered by the instructions of the all powerful Nurjahan. The people argued in their minds that queen Nurjahau could not openly go against the wishes of her husband who decided to place Prince Parbesh, his eldest son on the throne and in order to further that object Prince Khurum had been privately murdered. There was nothing strange in it in those dark gloomy days.

But the more intelligent section of the people could not remain satisfied with the above explanation. They said, "If Sahajada Khurum is dead, who were Bhim Singh and Mahabat Khan fighting for? Surely the Prince must be alive. But this much is certain that he was not to be found in the Rajput camp." The lower rank of the soldiers and the less intelligent section of the com-

munity were whispering into each other's ear, "Where is Sahajada Khurum?"

The Prince Parbesh had gone to fight with Bhim Singh and Mahabat Khan. But the Emperor Jahangir had pitched his camp near Fatepur Sikri, instead of helping Prince Parbesh by joining his army. It was a puzzle to all. None could, even the Mansabdar and Omraos, answer this query. They were only following the command of the Emperor, and they did not know more than that.

The people even entertained doubts whether the Emperor himself was fully cognisant of the deep and inner meaning of his own movements. Indeed he had pitched his camp outside the deserted city of Fatehpur Sikri. It was doubtful whether it was the outcome of his own initiative or he moved as a doll under the guidance of his imperious wife. People knew that for a long time the Emperor had fully abstained from attending to the business of the State, and only to keep up appearances to show the people that the Emperor existed, Jahangir made his appearance in the Darbar Hall. But such appearance was only few and far between, and his presence in the Durbar Hall was for a very short time. After attending the formalities of the court, the king used to retire to private chamber and gave himself up to drinking and pleasures with woman. In extreme cases Nurjahan remonstrated with the conduct of her husband but the Emperor smiled away and said. "I don't mind, so long you are here."

They all knew from the highest officers of the state to the lowest, from the Omraos and Mansabdar to the most ordinary subject of the Emperor, that the entire machinery of administration was absolutely under the control of that highly intelligent queen Nurjahan, whose father and brother wielded vast influence in the state. The Emperor was a mere nonentity and willingly submitted to the domination of his overmasterful wife.

But it was a known fact of history that the Emperor Jahangir was a great Scholar, a great poet and a man endowed with many other extraordinary virtues. Had he devoted himself to the affairs of the kingdom, there was no doubt that the vast Indian population of the time would have lived happier days; but none dared to speak out and Jahangir loved pleasures. If ever, by any suggestive means, Jahangir indicated that he got tired of Nurjahan, and wanted to get rid of her, help would have been pouring forth from all quarters, and the now all-powerful Nurjahan would have been nowhere in a moment's time, but they all knew that day would never come.

All the while the camp of the Emperor had been transformed into a veritable pleasure-hall. where all sorts of ornaments, gaities and frivolities were enjoyed to their fullest satiety. The most beautiful dancing girls were exhibiting their arts in accordance with the most sonorous songs and music played by the best experts of the time. All the while the stream of wine flowed by.

But all this time that extraordinary queen Nurjahan was not idly beguiling the hours. She was with the help of her faithful and devoted general encircling the entire site of the deserted Fatehpur Sikri, in the dim moonlight that shone around it, quite unperceived by her enemies. It was performed with a tact and secrecy that did credit to the shrewdest military genius of the day. Both Anil Singh, the Prince of Marwar, and Ajit Singh the Prince of Amhar were quartering with their army not far away from Fatehpur Sikri. But both of them were quite in the dark as to this military manoeuvre. The cunning queen was spreading her net silently, and to the ignorance of her enemies.

CHAPTER II.

THE DESERTED CITY.

Let us take our readers to that love-scene which we left sometimes ago. Both Bimal Singh and Lulia, had no idea how time stole away imperceptibly when they were immersed in the elysian bliss being in almost each other's embrace in that moon-lit night quite oblivious of the world around them. Bimal Singh did not entertain any doubt in his heart of hearts as to any conspiracy which was being hatched to frustrate his aim. He thought that some soldiers of infernal nature serving under either Ajit Singh or Anil Singh must have tied up the mouth of Lulia and kidnapped her, or about to do so, being inflamed by the insatiable lust of passion, engendered in that dovilish heart by the matchless beauties of Lulia. But he knew that the character of both Ajit Singh and Anil Singh was beyond any reproach, and it seemed to him quite unlikely that such brave heroes of such unimpeachable character could ever dream of practising such a foul deed upon so sweet and innocent a girl as Lulia. When he was returning after escorting Lulia home, he encountered an armed Rajput soldier.

He was walking rather in a thoughtful and contemplative turn of mind, as if forgetful of what was passing on by his side. He could not fully understand what the Rajput General had said to him, but he looked towards his face with eyes indicative of wonder. The stranger in a smiling voice said. "It would have been better to put off the love matter for the present."

Bimal Singh's face expanded with a smile, and said in a half-clear voice—"Oh! My dearest friend, I have nothing to conceal from you. I have seen several women—ladies of reputed beauties—in my life, but my heart was never moved by that noble sentiment of love."

The Rajput general retorted "Dear friend, we can now ill afford to indulge in love-making. Danger thickens fast around us!

Bimal Singh slowly asked, "Is there any news for me?"

The stranger "You want news? War is imminent. it will begin in a day or two. That indomitable woman Nurjahan is out in the field with the Emperor himself."

"It would not matter much. Let them be out, we don't mind it. We long for the defeat of Parbesh, which will clear the way."

"He may not be defeated. But I am afraid, victory on our side will not give us much. Death is certain."

Bimal Singh cast an amazing gaze towards his

friend, and then slowly replied "Bhim Singh, I am not disposed to this sort of man-killing, I don't like that you contaminate your fair hand by such horrible deeds of sin."

Bhim Singh smiled and said, "The Rajputs never contaminate their heroic hands by this sort of foul deeds—it is only possible in the Mogul Court."

"I don't fully catch your meaning,"

"If Parbesh is not killed in the battle, Nurjahan will kill him."

A sense of bewilderment not unmixed with wonder seemed to have overtaken him. He stood silent for a while and cast an amazing look of curiosity upon the face of the Rajput General! His mind was not prepared to receive such an unexpected, and impossible news, and like a mute statue, he stood motionless!"

Bhim Singh continued. "I have received credible information through the agency of spies that Nurjahan is bent upon plotting for the removal of both the Sahajadas to be clear, she is trying to have both of them secretly murdered!"

Bimal Singh's countenance assumed a pale appearance, and in a choked voice he asked—"Why?"

Bhim Singh retorted "Why? You ask—why? It is a very simple question, and very easy of solution. Nurjahan wants to see her son-in-law Shariyer to be the future Emperor of India, and you know nothing is impossible for that extraordinary woman,"

Bimal Singh did not make any response. Both of

them silently moved towards the main gate. Suddenly a terrible sound of lamentation reverberated in all directions. Both of them stood motionless and cast their anxious, curious looks in all directions. The night was about to have passed away, the moon-light was fading into day, and everything in nature was indistinctly visible, but the origin of the sound could not be traced.

The deep sound of lamentations and screamings were no longer heard, but it echoed and re-echoed and then melted away into thin air. Now a pindrop sombre silence began to prevail all around and the scene assumed a calm and dreadful appearance.

Bimal Singh cast an enquiring look towards the face of Bhim Singh and said, "What's the matter?"

Bhim Singh said, "I don't understand it fully—think the sound of screaming came from within the fort."

The heart of Bimal Singh was extremely anxious on account of that sweet girl Lulia, and the suspicion arose in his mind if any ruffian had assaulted the deity of his life, but the thought vanished away as he clearly heard that the screaming came from outside and not from the old Omraos house. But what was this sound and what was its origin?

Being unable to come to a decision he muttered in a tone of despondency, "Dangers on all sides, I don't know what course to follow."

Bhim Singh said, "Entertaining a deep suspicion in her mind, Nurjahan—though not the Emperor—came

near and pitched her camp round this deserted city. I have made an inspection, so to say of that camp this night——”

Bimal Singh was apparently taken by surprise and interrupting Bhim Singh cried out, “What do you say?” You acted like a fool. Some one might have detected you.”

Bhim Singh smilingly answered, “Every body was literally plunged in pleasures; women and wine with all their concomitants were playing their parts,—singing, music, dancing, and drinking, converted the camp into a veritable whoredom, Every one was out of his senses, and there was none sober enough to recognize me. Moreover I had been dressed like a soldier of Marwar, and had artificial beard long enough to reach my breast.”

Bimal Singh suddenly cried out, What’s that? Look here, thick dust is rising up to the sky, as if there has been dust-storm.”

Bhim Singh got upon a heap of debris and cast a sharp look on all directions. His countenance suddenly turned pale and grave, and he found to his infinite amazement that innumerable cavalry soldiers were encircling the deserted city. He cried out, “Who are they? They do not belong to us,”

Bimal Singh smiled a forced smile and said, “Bhim Singh, every body might be lost in debauchery and pleasures, but Nurjahan is a woman of extraordinary character and silently and cautiously she has almost encircled us, and we——”

Bimal Singh suddenly jumped up and moved a few steps forward,—a monkey jumped down from the ceiling of the nearest house and placed itself just beneath his feet! The sudden appearance of a monkey in such a state in that lonely deserted city, even captured their brave minds with surprise and fear, and they looked towards its face with wonder. The monkey-shaped animal casting its eyes towards them with a dreadful laugh. Its protruding set of teeth made a horrible figure. Their mind was captured with a highest pitch of wonder when it spoke out, "Letter for you."

Both of them were taken by extreme surprise and stood there dumbfounded for sometime. No human being could think of this small animal anything other than a monkey! The animal stood upon its two legs and stretched out a piece of paper from its arm-pit, at which Bhim Singh cried out, "Who are you?"

The monkey-shaped animal answered, "I am Dulali" at which both of them cried out in a surprising tone, "How is it. Dulali in this peculiar appearance—you are here?"

Dulali assumed a grave appearance and in a grave voice said, "Raj Kumar (Prince), pray listen, not a minute to be lost in idle gossip. The entire town has been surrounded by the Emperor's soldiers,—and none of us can hope to escape from this place!"

Bimal Singh cast an anxious, and fearful look towards Bhim Singh, who opened the letter and then made it

over to Bimal Singh. The letter was a very short one and ran as follows :—

“Marium Begum's house,—living in Badsha's camp.”

Bhim Singh asked in a subdued tone, “Whence is this letter?”

Dulali whispered something into his ear at which Bhim Singh said, “Not a minute to be lost,—go,—go—Marium Begum's house!”

Bimal Singh anxiously enquired, “And what about you?” Bhim Singh said in an assuring tone, I have got my horse ready outside—I shall mix myself up in the Marwar camp among Marwar soldiers.”

“But it is not unattended with danger.”

A Rajput is never afraid of danger—go,—go, don't lose a second!”

“I don't like to let you go in the midst of danger.”

Bhim Singh answered with a frowning countenance, “Go, if you kill time in this way, it will bring us to more trouble and danger!”

After advancing a few steps, Bimal Singh stood up and said, “I must save the life of Lulia at the risk of my own,—how to protect her.”

Before any reply came from the great General Bhim Singh, Dulali said, “You need not be anxious, so long I am alive!” Bimal Singh cast a hesitating look upon the then monkey-shaped human being, at which Bhim Singh said, “Bimal Singh, you need not be anxious. Our friends there must have made arrangements for the protection of the life of your Lulia. You better go

at once,—everything will be spoiled, if any danger overtakes you."

Dulali in an assuring tone said, "Raj Kumar, there are many who will be too glad to lay down their lives for the protection of Lulia. I shall not move an inch from this place of Fatehpur Sikri, and move about from this place to that place, jumping from this roof to that roof. If the Moguls enter this forsaken city, they must rue the consequence of it. They must depart with the better experience of this place, and shall never forget in their lives this Dulali monkey." The terrible screamings, and the dreadful cries that I made a few minutes before must have impressed them with the idea that the place is a haunted one !"

Bimal Singh exclaimed, "I am much relieved ; I may take it that you are the author of that mysterious sound !"

Dulali said, "I had no other alternative ; otherwise, I could not have escaped the vigilance of that sharp eyed scoundrel Gaharjan. Oh ! He is a terrible man indeed !"

Both of them exclaimed, "Who is he ?"

"He is a spy of Nurjahan"

"Is he here ? Has he accompanied the queen ?"

"Oh yes, sometime before, I suddenly found myself before him, and but for that terrible screamings I was about to be detected."

"Where is he now "

"He has gone to Salabat Khan's place !"

"Oh dreadful ! What's the way to get out of it ?"

"The remedy lies with me, as well as with him. Gaharjan is not worthy to unloose his shoes lachet."

Just at this moment the Moguls seemed to have arrived at the precincts of the deserted city, and they made loud war cries. There was no time to lose,—Bhim Singh pushed aside Bimal Singh, and ran as fast as he could towards the hills and forests ;—he had his horse concealed there.

Bimal Singh also did not tarry ; he ran towards the heap of ruins, just the place to conceal him, and entirely hid himself there. Dulali heaved a deep sigh, and remained standing there for sometime, quite unmindful of everything ; but the noise became louder and louder and Dulali also concealed herself in those ruins.

CHAPTER III.

MONKEY.

Just at break of day the great Mogul army surrounded the fort of Fatehpur Sikri. The great general himself pitched his own camp in front of the gate, and none could leave Fatehpur without his permission; the entrance into the town was also dependent upon his sanction. All these arrangements were made by the guiding genius.

The day had advanced a little when the siege was nearly complete. The venerable mosque of Fatehpur Sikri, its mighty spires and domes covered with gold of dazzling brillianee, was sparkling in the sunshine. The day was bright and brilliant, and the old revered Moulavi of the mosque was reciting his prayer, in a sonorous, dignified tone, which reverberating through space poured into the hearts of the soldiers which leaped with joy and panted to join the Moulavi; but when permission was sought, the inexorable General nodded his head and refused, and so the Mogul soldiers were obliged to say their prayers outside the fort.

The General took his seat at the gate and sent for old Salabat. The old man thereupon directed steps,

towards the gate, walking with a good deal of difficulty, mainly with the assistance of his walking stick. He made due obeisance to the great Mogul General. His long, white beard, dignified look and reverential appearance commanded the respect and awe of the people and he was given a seat by the side of the General. Salbat Khan was a man of saintly character and everybody knew that he had devoted himself to the pursuit of religion after renouncing all the comforts and pleasures of the world,—that he selected this lovely, solitary place in the deserted town of Fatehpur with a view to avoid coming in contact with the worldly people of the time. He shunned all the pomp and noise of the Mogul Court and was literally a religious recluse. No doubt, he was endowed with extra ordinary intelligence, and had he been disposed to direct his energies to worldly advancement, he would surely have been the greatest officer in the Mogul Court.

Not that the Mogul General was unaware of these facts, but he had no other alternative as he had to obey the commands of Nurjahan. The religious reputation of Salabat dispelled all doubts from his mind, and he was not a little surprised at the suspicion which the queen entertained against the Saint. But he must silently obey the mandates of Nurjahan, the all powerful, unrivalled Mogul Queen.

The great Mogul General paid him all due respect and then said in an apologetic tone, "I am afraid, I am giving you much trouble. I hope to be excused

for this,—but the mandate of His Majesty must be obeyed."

Salabat answered in a modest tone, "The Emperor has pitched his camp very close to this long-forgotten deserted city. I got this information only last night, I must go to pay my humble tribute of respect to His Majesty this very day. What order is this humble servant of His Majesty to carry out? We must congratulate ourselves that the Emperor has very kindly remembered this forsaken place, after such a length of time; may I hope that the place will be honoured by the visit of His Majesty.

The General answered, "I have not yet received an order to that effect."

"Why then you are all——"

"I have been ordered to surround this deserted city with soldiers,—His Majesty has been pleased to order me to prevent all ingress and egress to and from that town."

The old *fakir* seemed to be extremely surprised and said, "Why this order? There is none else in this town except my humble self and the Moulavi of the mosque—"

The General again lowered his tone and said, "Pray don't take it amiss, I have been so ordered."

"The Moulavi is not allowed to go out?"

"No, none is allowed."

"Pray, tell me why such an unkind order is passed against this humble servant."

"I am afraid, I can not enlighten you on the point ;

by order of His Majesty, I am obliged to ask you a few questions."

The old man put both his hands to his head, and said in a submissive tone "The order of His Majesty must be obeyed at all costs—I am the most humble servant of His Majesty."

The General remained silent for a while, and then asked "Will you please tell me who else, other than the Moulavi and your holy self lives in this deserted city?"

Salabat answered "My humble self, my servant Mahomad Jan, and maid servant Hamida."

The General cast a searching, scrutinising look upon the face of the old man and again demanded "May I take it as infallible and correct, are you positive that none else lives in this forsaken town?"

In a strong voice and re-assuring tones Salabat said, "I have been living in this deserted town for a long time, and I have never seen any body else here."

The General told him in a threatening tone "Look here, Omrao Shaheb ;—I foresee danger awaits you."

The old man's face became crimson, and he uttered in a slow measured tone. "I hope His Majesty is well aware that Salabat never speaks an untruth."

The Mogul General simpered and said "We have strong evidence that there dwells another man in your house."

The old man in a strong voice and with an earnestness of tone said "I submit, it is a downright falsehood."

The General again smiled and said "Truth will come out immediately ; I ask you again to tell me whether your daughter or grand daughter lives in this house. You don't admit it ?"

The old man in a firm voice said "No, certainly not,"

The Mogul rejoined, "It may be that the girl is in no way connected with you, she may be the daughter of Hamida, or your servant Mahomad Jan."

Salabat Khan retorted "It cannot be ; if the daughter or grand daughter of my servant lives in my house, the fact must be known to me !"

"I may then take it that you deny it totally."

"Certainly I do, every syllable of it."

"Your servant and maidservant are the only members of your family, and none else ?"

"No, why should I conceal it, if there is anyone ?"

"I don't know that, I have been ordered to make a thorough and minute search of this town, I shall ransack every creek and corner of it, and everything will be found. In spite of it, you stick to your denial ?"

"Certainly, I do."

The Mogul General remained silent for a while and slowly said. Then you positively say that Shahazada Khurum has not concealed himself in this town ?"

Salabat seemed to have just dropped from the blue expanding his eyes wide open which was indicative of extreme surprise, he said "Shahazada Khurum ! Shahazada Khurum has concealed himself in this place ?"

"Yes, we have information to this effect."

The old man with pointed force in his words returned, "Impossible! I must have been aware of it."

The General smiled contemptuously and retorted, "You know everything, but you are determined to keep it secret!"

The old Omrao to have been overtaken by a fit of extreme anger, his whole frame was shaking with inexpressible rage, and in a choked voice he said "General, may I enquire if his Majesty has ordered you to insult me in my old age?"

"I have no such orders certainly, but if you deny all knowledge of that girl and Prince Khurum now living in this town, I have been asked to send you to the Emperor's Camp!"

"The Emperor's order must be first obeyed. Let me go home and prepare myself for the journey to the Camp of the Emperor. I shall at once kiss the dust of His noble feet."

The old Salabat was about to rise up when the General said, "I have been ordered not to let you go back to your house,"

Salabat a little agitated asked "Am I then a prisoner?"

"Yes, it is really so, pray, pardon me, the order of the Emperor must be carried out."

For a while the face of Salabat bore visible marks of consternation and fear; but shrewd as he was, he succeeded in controlling the outburst of passions that were

uppermost in his mind and said in a firm voice, "The command of his Majesty must be obeyed first, but pray tell me, if I am allowed to send information to my servants,—everything in my house is in chaotic disorder."

The General in a strong voice uttered "I tell you for your information that both your servant and maid-servant have been taken prisoners for hatching a conspiracy against the Emperor——"

With a great emotion Salabat exclaimed "Hamida and Mahomad Jan are prisoners—and for plotting against the Emperor! What do you say, General, I can't make any sense out of it!"

The General in a mild tone said "Pray excuse me, I am not permitted to divulge any more."

Salabat: "May I enquire where my servant and maid-servant have been sent?"

"Oh yes! they are now prisoners, soon they will be sent to the execution place."

No doubt the news was too much even for that astute, resolute old man Salabat; for a while he remained silent, as if struck by an overwhelming sense of surprise; thoughts of a different description were revolving in his mind; but he knew that the wily and sagacious Mogul General was casting a searching look upon his face to read what was passing in his mind; and with a superhuman effort, he controlled the excess of feeling uppermost in his mind, and remained silent for a while and then asked, "Have they been proved guilty?"

"Yes, their guilt has been proved."

"Who proved it?"

"Gaharjan."

"Who is he? Somebody saw me a little while ago he gave out his name as Gaharjan."

"Omrao Shaheb, I am not even allowed to say so much; what I say is out of respect to your position."

"I may take it then, that as an accomplice, I shall be sent to the execution ground?"

"I cannot give you that information,—I have been asked to send you to the Emperor!"

"In this old age His Majesty has yielded to such a grievous wrong?"

Suddenly a terrible noise arose from every side, the Mogul soldiers shouted out, "A monkey, a monkey; no, not a monkey,—it is Dulali, the monkey-shaped girl!"

CHAPTER IV.

SEARCH.

There was one special reason for this tremendous noise over this monkey affair ;—when the Mogul General was deeply engaged in conversation with the old Salabat, a somewhat heavy stone suddenly struck the face of the General who at once stood up, and covered his face with both hands repeatedly uttering, as if spontaneously, the word "Toba" ; he was rather seriously wounded, as his nose was almost broken. But this was not the end of the matter, quite a shower of bricks and stones assailed the Mogul army, particularly the General. All eyes were directed towards the quarter from which the stone-shower came, and they found to their infinite surprise that all this mischief was the act of a monkey ! The soldiers made a gigantic effort to catch the animal, who decamped after showing a horribly disfigured face ! The General, wounded as he was, and stung with a keen sense of ignominy and shame passed the following order ;—"The monkey must be killed at all hazards and at once," and to carry out the orders, a number of soldiers followed or rather tried to follow the movements of the monkey !

The General pointing to old Salabat ordered some soldiers to take him to His Majesty.

When the soldiers advanced towards him, Salabat cried out, "Pray don't insult me, I am going of my own accord."

Slowly he stood up and then asked, "May I not expect to see my servant and maidservant once?"

The General who had already lost his temper, cried out in a paroxysm of rage, "No—no such orders."

Salabat did not make any response, but silently obeyed the General and followed the soldiers.

Our readers are aware that during the Mahomedan rule, life and property were most unsafe, everybody was prepared—particularly those in high life—to meet death at any time,—there was no organised law court for the trial of offences as now exists,—the will of the Emperor was law! Even the person losing his life sometimes remained quite ignorant as to the cause of his death; and as a matter of consequence, old Salabat kept an unperturbed mind, quite undaunted, even at the approach of death; there might be reasons for this unusual equanimity of mind. However, he followed the soldiers to the Emperor's camp. He could not know the whereabouts of Mahomed Jan or Hamida, nor the fate which awaited them.

After the departure of Salabat, the Mogul General dispersed the meeting, and addressed the soldiers in the following terms, "Soldiers, remember we have very

solemn duty to perform, on the success of which depends our future. Ten of you make a band, and form as many such bands as possible, and then proceed to make a thorough search of this town. Be careful, you must ransack every house, every room, every road, street and lane, in fact every creek and corner of this city—the ruins of Fatehpur Sikri must be thoroughly searched. If you meet with any human being, you must bring him alive to me, but if any one tries to escape from your grasp, you are to follow him and shoot him then and there.”

Just at this time, the soldiers who followed the monkey to kill it came back disappointed and sorrowfully said, “Hoozoor, our utmost search fails—we are pained to utter it—to get a trace of the monkey who was the cause of our shame and disgrace.

The General again lost his temper and thundered forth, “The animal cannot dissolve itself into thin air, at all events, and at any risk you must kill it, send orders outside to the effect that if they meet with any monkey, it must be killed outright.”

At this unexpected order, the soldiers were looking into each other's face with a hesitating glance, when the General in an angry tone uttered, “Come forward, tell me plainly, you fools, what has happened ; why are you like so many dumb creatures ?”

Upon which some one bolder than the rest began to scratch his head and said in a half audible voice, “Hoozoor, the ghost affair is not utterly false,”

The General frowned and in a thundering voice asked, "What's that, tell me, you boobies, what you have seen ?

The soldier in a modest, half audible, faltering voice answered, "Hoozoor. Lord of our life, we are very much afraid to tell you that, when we ran after the monkey, it suddenly became transformed !"

The Mogul General laughed a derisive laugh and said, "You stupid, you mean to say that it was no longer a monkey ?"

The soldier in faltering tones submitted, "My Lord, it is as true as the rising of the sun ; unless you see it with your own eyes, you will not be disposed to believe it, pray ask every one present; and they all will, I am sure, unhesitatingly corroborate my statement."

"I want to know what has happened ?"

"The monkey after reaching the roof of a house suddenly transformed itself into a little girl of ten or twelve years old !"

"Is that so ? Why don't you then bring her down to this place ?"

"My Lord a dozon of us got upon the roof and the others surrounded the house, to prevent any possible escape—they were all keeping vigilant watch, but—but we failed to get any trace of her ;—we made our utmost effort !

The General clenched his set of teeth and growled out, "Stupid wretch," and then in a more clear voice said,

"Mind you, fool, there are many other people in this town and it contains several private rooms, passages and doors, go and make a minute and thorough search of every quarter, every nook and corner of this village, I am going to see the Moulavi, and then personally join you ; send information outside to the effect that if any body tries to get out of this town, he must be arrested then and there and sent back to me."

The soldiers, those who had witnessed the incident were under the impression that it was a purely supernatural act, beyond human power—a monkey could not at all of a sudden transform into a girl and even admitting that it was so, it can not melt at once into space. For a long time, they had been hearing stories of ghostly activities in Fatehpur Sikri, and the present phenomenon could not be otherwise explained than on the basis of some supernatural force. But they were less apprehensive of supernatural danger in day time, and they marched out fully armed in different directions to investigate the whole affair—to make thorough and minute search of the several heaps of ruins in the town in order to get at the truth. Moreover they were fully conscious of the consequences which might await them in the event of their disobeying the general's order.

The Mogul General moved towards the grave of Salim Fakir in order to meet the Moulavi ;— he muttered to himself, " I see now-a-days, these Moulavies have gained great influence. The reason is obvious, the Emperor who is the guardian

angel of religion, is neglectful of his duties. He is openly violating the tenets of Islam, and thus riding roughshod over the sentiments of the true followers of Mahomad—he does not say his prayers even once a day—whereas according to the Koran, he should pray five times a day; for this simple reason the true Mahomedans have become disciples of these Moulavies, and naturally enough their sense of pride has been very much inflated! Look at the audacity of the Moulavi,—he knows that I have been here, but he does care to favour me with a visit. The Emperor when told of it, will only smile and would console us by saying that as we do not bother ourselves with religion, as his whole time is entirely taken up with secular matters, it is better that we should put up with their whims, that we must give them all possible indulgence! So we are undone. I see unless there is an out-and-out bigoted Mahomedan Emperor to rule over us, I am sure, the Mogul Empire will break into pieces,”

Some one from behind his back whispered “Then the Empire will be really shattered to pieces.”

The undreamt of utterance of the above expression startled the General,—he felt as if suddenly struck by an arrow. In a moment, he turned back, and carefully turned his eyes in all directions, but to his utter amazement, he could not find any trace of a human being; with a disturbed mind, he moved hither and thither but except the distant noise made by his soldiers, nothing reached his ears.

The state of bewilderment through which the Mogul General was passing can be better imagined than described. He said to himself, "I can't be mistaken, I clearly heard the sound of a human voice, it is rather the voice of a woman, I am as conscious of it as of my own existence! Certainly there are other human beings living in this deserted place. Old Salabat told me a series of lies! But never mind whoever dwells in this place must be known to me. If necessary, I shall demolish this dilapidated town and throw the heaps of ruins into the water, I shall dig out the very foundation of this once beautiful city. I must find out the culprits.

For sometime longer the General continued his minute search in all directions but to no effect, he then advanced a little and said to himself, "I see life his most unsafe in this place, every moment there is risk of death, there is no knowing who will assail me from which quarter."

In a thoughtful mood he approached the grave of Salim; he found no one there, then he went to the rear of the grave and found that in a small house some one was lying down fully covered from head to foot. He addressed him thus "Who are you? Do you know where the Moulavi Shaheb."

The strong voice of the General reached the sleeper's ears and with a shaky hand, he uncovered his face,—the long white beard, and the reverential appearance of the man left no doubt in the mind of the General that the man

lying there was no other than the Moulavi of whom he had heard so much. He found that the Moulavi was trembling owing to extreme cold, evidently showing that he was suffering from high fever.

The Moulavi in a groaning, plaintive voice said, "Welcome sir, fever—high—fever!"

"I see you are alone here, who will nurse and attend you, you are badly in need of good treatment, Oh, I am very sorry."

The Moulavi again in faltering voice said, "Fakir—dear son—Fakir—Allah will save—a Fakir—"

"Perhaps you have heard that in obedience to the order of His Majesty, I have been here with an army."

"Yes—I have—sit down—my good General—Baba."

"If your Holyself be so pleased, I may send people to look after you."

"No baba! You need not trouble yourself on my account—I am a Fakir—I have none in this world, save and except my Allah, who will protect me."

"I must not then disturb you any more,—but pray excuse me, I am bound to ask you a few questions."

"Yes, go on"

"If any body concealed here."

"No my dear, if so, I must have been aware of it."

"Then you mean to say that old Salabat and his servant and maid servant are all the inhabitants of this place?"

"Besides my humbleself."

"Then none else?"

"No, not a human soul besides us."

"Do you believe in ghostly stories?"

"Down right, absolute falsehood, my dear."

"You may take rest, I don't like to disturb you any more."

The General left the place of the Moulavi, but his doubts deepening and thus musing all the while, "Is it likely that this Mahomedan Fakir has spoken falsely. Are they all lies? It may be that this old Fakir is quite unconcerned with the affairs of the world and may not be acquainted with what is passing in this town. However, I don't understand everything, if any one lies hidden in this place, he must be found that."

So saying Mahomad Toki, the Mogul General gave a big jump.

CHAPTER V.

GHOST OR MAN.

There was sufficient reason for this unusual jump on the part of the Mogul General; he thought that a dreadful, venomous snake with its usual hissing sound was about to bite him! The sound which he heard was exactly that of a large Cobra who greatly enraged by being trodden under foot runs to bite its assailant. The General was perspiring profusely,—the blood seemed to have suddenly disappeared from his face, his breathing became quicker, and the thought of impending death disfigured his whole countenance, which became ashy pale while his eyes were wide open.

Mahomad Toki by a big leap had moved ten cubits away from the place where he was standing,—he in the twinkling of an eye, unsheathed his sword—but where was the snake? With palpitating heart he looked in all directions, but could not see any trace of the snake from which he was apprehending death. He thought that in a forsaken town, it is not unlikely that the snake had entered a hole in the debris, and he consoled his mind with the belief that the snake had gone into its resting place under the ground.

He directed his steps towards the quarter from

which the noise of his soldiers came; he moved on rapidly and after advancing some distance he cast his eyes backwards and did not see any human being behind him. Again he went on at an accelerated speed, but all along he felt that some one was following him, that some one was also staring at him. He felt very uneasy; with a restlessness he looked hither and thither, but could not see any one; he consoled his mind with the idea that in a deserted city, he had heard the echo of his own footsteps.

After advancing a few steps further, he suddenly stopped. He heard the melodious voice of a woman singing sweet music; it was pleasant to his ears—some one was playing on a musical instrument, and it raised the drooping spirits of Mahomad Toki, and his pale countenance assumed a smiling appearance, and he said to himself, "Who says that this ruinous city, is not peopled? I can't disbelieve the evidence of my ears, still the music is going on! It is strange—our presence in the town makes no difference! Quite unconcerned! Where can they go now?"

The door was wide open, and the General with sword unsheathed entered the house. But he was quite astonished on noticing the uncared-for appearance of it;—all the rooms were full of dust and every feature of the room irresistibly pointed to the one conclusion that the house had never been used for a long time. But the sweet sound of music was still regaling his ears, and it seemed to be coming from the next room; he

spoke aloud, "Who is playing a guitar in the next room of this deserted house?" His curiosity not unmixed with fear exceeded its legitimate bounds.

The General entered the side room, but he did not see any one there. Mark his astonishment—the house was full of the dust for years together. Devoured by a sense of unspeakable wonder, Mahomad Toki cried out, "Whence does the music come? It seems now the music is coming from a room in the front row."

He clearly heard that the music was coming from the room which he had just left, but there was no doubt in his mind that the room had not been used before; but to remove his curiosity, he again inspected the room, merely to get his curiosity and amazement doubly heightened; there was no trace of any human being in the room but the sweet sound of music was still pouring into his ears.

Mahomad Toki was not a coward, he was a brave General, much respected for heroism and valour but the above incidents had struck him with a sense of awe and amazement which he had never experienced before in his life! He stood there silent and motionless, but a little while after, the expression "I see the story of the Ghost is not altogether unfounded" almost unconsciously came out of his lips.

A moment after Mahomad Toki cried out "Allah, Allah," at the topmost of his voice, and ran out of the house as fast as he could! All of a sudden an ass made so terrible a noise just behind the back of Mahomad

Toki, that it entirely upset his mental equilibrium. It was not the braying of an ordinary ass but the sound which that invisible ass made was so tremendous that any ordinary human being would have lost his consciousness then and there! Mahomad Toki came out gasping and panting for breath, when he heard to his utter bewilderment, the sweet sounds of laughter coming from a bevy of ladies! The General did not altogether lose his consciousness, and he did not think it prudent to tarry there any longer; accordingly he ran towards the main gate with all possible speed. All the while he felt that some one was following him clapping, but he had not the courage to turn back and see who it was, and at last he arrived at the place where the main body of the force was stationed. The soldiers were taken aback by this unexpectedly pitiable condition of their General and they were casting anxious, inquiring looks upon the face of Mahomad Toki, who feeling the awkwardness of his position, tried his utmost to keep the natural equanimity of his mind and to appear to be quite undisturbed asked them "Have any of you seen a man passing this way?"

The soldiers exchanged looks, their countenance betraying uncertainty, and the boldest of them said "no, none has gone this way."

The General said "Is it likely that I was mistaken? You have not seen anything, come along with me; I shall make a sifting, thorough search of every nook and corner of this town, Did you notice any thing?"

They respectfully submitted "No, our Lord, all the houses are vacant and so full of dust, it seems that these houses have not been used for a long time,"

"All right, better seek another house."

Having passed the above order, Mahomad Toki directed his steps onward ; he did not think it wise to speak to his soldiers about his experiences, as he rightly thought that by divulging the Mystery his already terror-stricken soldiers who had heard enough of ghostly activities, would be almost helpless with fear, and it would be extremely difficult to keep them under control in that place, and as a matter of consequence, he would be an object of ridicule with the Emperor, and advancing a little, he asked his soldiers to follow him saying, "Come along, let us go to Salabat Khan first."

All of them directed their steps towards the residence of Salabat, the doors of whose house still remained open for the reason that both Mahomad Jan and Hamida could not find time to close them when they were arrested. Every article in the house was in a disorderly state, and the parlour room was full of delicious smell issuing from sweet-scented tobacco which was being prepared when Salabat had left the room.

The General made a minute, careful search of every room, every corridor in the house of Salabat, and in order to discover a private room or a private way out of it, he tapped various places in the wall. The house was made of red marble, and the utmost efforts of the

General failed to discover any private way out of it. He minutely examined all the rooms from the parlour down to the kitchen, but no trace of any suspicious arrangements for entering or leaving could be found. He broke open all the boxes and safes and ransacked them to get a clue to the wonderful occurrence which had met his eyes a few hours before. He thought within himself that some one must have played false with the Badsha Begum, there was no sign or indication of any young woman having ever lived here—a young lady must have her dressing arrangements, but nothing here found could point to the conclusion that there had ever been a lady living in this place. It is indeed a striking fact that nowhere had he found any money of any value in any of the boxes or safes of this old man,—how could he manage to get on? It was a mystery no doubt.

Suddenly the name of Gaharjan flashed across the mind of the General, and turning towards his soldiers, he asked them, "Have yon seen any one by the name of Gaharjan?"

The soldiers looked at their General's face and said, "No, Sir, we have not yet seen any body in this town!"

"Let us go to examine the other houses."

So saying Mahomad Toki came out of the house of the old Omrao. It was about mid-day then; one of the soldiers, a little bolder than the rest with much hesitation while scratching his head muttered forth, "Hoozoor, the day has far advanced——"

Before he could finish the sentence, the General interrupted and said with a frowning countenance, 'No, by no means, we must first of all complete our search, and then think of eating and drinking.'

The soldiers did not venture to make any further remark and silently followed him. Just at this time another band of soldiers who had gone to a different quarter joined the General's party and informed him that they had not meet with any individual throughout their search, that almost all the houses without any exception had been left vacant, full of dust with all the doors wide open,—the entire town was virtually a heap of ruins. Indeed every thing pointed to the irresistible conclusion that the town had been without any population for a long time.

The General silently heard what they had narrated. He personally began to search all possible places in the town, but all his efforts failed—not a single animal or a bird could be traced, not to speak of any human being, for the scarcity of water had driven away every beast from that place.

It is unnecessary to relate that Mahomad Toki was quite astounded at the unusual course of events, the strangeness of which was pressing heavily upon his mind, but any disclosure on his part would have a demoralising effect upon the whole army who would be almost terrified to death, and so he decided to keep to himself the recent, strange experiences of his life. When he approached the house of Marium Begum, he found that

the outer gate was under lock and key, He stood there silently for a while fixing his gaze upon the gate, and then said to himself "It is strange that of all the houses, this is the only one under lock and key;" he then ordered his men to break it open.

He had more than a hundred followers with him, who instead of trying to unlock the gate, broke it open and entered the court-yard which they found full of jungle. The garden was full of weeds and bore marks of inattention and neglect for a long time. Mahomad Toki first entered the compound, and the soldiers followed him, one by one in quick succession. When all of them had gathered together in the court-yard, a strange event happened which quite unnerved and bewildered them,—they heard to their amazement, and consternation the cries of lamentation and wailings of a number of human beings, evidently females, as if they had lost some one near and dear! The strangeness of the situation terrified them beyond description, and the soldiers remained standing like so many statues benumbed with fear! The whole compound was surrounded by high walls, and the main gate—the only entrance—was under lock and key! Who then were likely to be the inmates, and whom had they lost just now? People said that the town was a deserted one and they had their own experience to support the statement; how then could this strange incident be accounted for? It was an enigma and a puzzle to the soldiers, and Mahomad Toki was himself seriously affected by the

extraordinary event, and for a while, he too, remained as motionless as the stump of a tree! The cries of lamentation were rising higher and higher, and the intensity and pathos of the situation were greatly enhanced by the fact that they seemed to have heard sounds which did not leave any doubt in their minds that the lamenting women were beating their breasts in the excess of their sorrow. At this time the General cried out, "What are you thinking, cowards? Go and see who has lost his life." But the soldiers did not move an inch; in a state of utter indecision marks of fear depicted on their countenance, they began to look at each other's face. The heroic heart of Mahomad Toki could not bear such a scene and severely reprimanding his soldiers, he ran towards the room from which the cries of lamentations were coming and by a big stride he got into the room. But to his sense of indescribable bewilderment, he could not see any trace of a human being, all sounds of wailings were hushed in silence in the twinkling of an eye! The suddenness with which the cries of lamentation arose, with the same degree of unexpectedness they vanished!

Mahomed Toki did not see any body in the room. His mental state can be better imagined than described; the circulation of blood in his veins suddenly stopped, as if it had suddenly turned into water! After a while, he recovered his senses, and with great difficulty he called his men into the room. They most unwillingly obeyed him; their faces were ashy pale,

when they found none in the room. They were suddenly as if by a magic wand converted into so many stone statues. Their already bewildered mind again received another shock too heavy to withstand! Their ears were assailed with peals of dreadful laughter. The rigour of military discipline could not keep them under control, and they ran towards the main gate with the name of the Almighty in their mouths. Mahomad Toki, as if led by an invisible power unwillingly followed them. He heard that a number of demons were following him with hideous claps of laughter.

CHAPTER VI.

THE CAMP DISSOLVED.

The report of the incident described in the last Chapter was gradually circulated among the rank and file of the army ; in fact it spread in an exaggerated, hideous form. The General himself had fled with all possible haste, not to speak of the ordinary soldiers ! They knew the consequence of their conduct ; they preferred losing their heads by the sword of His Majesty to losing their lives in the hands of ghosts ! Every one of them was determined to leave that town at all hazards. They could not be induced to stay there even for a day more. They held a private conference among themselves and decided to speak out their minds to their General hinting that they would disobey his orders, if their residence in that haunted town was any longer insisted upon. They thought that the horrible experiences which they had in broad day light would be a thousand times worse during the night !

Mahomad Toki himself took shelter in his own camp ;—for a long while he remained secluded in that room musing over the whole situation. Indeed he felt much humiliated before the world. What was to be done now ? How so retrieve his lost honour ? He could not disbelieve his own ears,—he heard clearly and unmistakably the sweet music played upon a guitar, and

they all heard a few minutes before the alternate sounds of the most heart-rending cries of bereavment and loud peals of laughter and merriment! How could that be explained away except by reference to supernatural agency. If that be so, why then do both the Moulavi and Salabat totally deny any knowledge of it? Was it likely that those supernatural beings were favourably disposed towards them and did not disturb them at any time? Could it be likely that the Badsha's people were only subject to their persecution! Even if that be the case, the Emperor would be the last person to believe such an unnatural story, and he (Toki) would be proved and considered a good-for-nothing coward! The idea began to torture him, the more so, when he apprehended that very soon, he would lose the confidence and favour of that great queen Nurjahan. It was also not unlikely that he should have to lose his life to propitiate that terrible queen. Mahomad Toki was passing each moment in such an unhappy and unhinged state of mind, when his servant approached and made due obeisance to him and said, "The heads of each detachment of the army are anxious to pay their respects to you."

The General responded, "Let them come." He then thought "it is better to have a consultation with them; the incidents of to-day can not be kept secret."

Mahomad Toki was the commander of the whole forces, and he had under him four faithful and renowned Generals to whom he had made over the responsible

charge of protecting the town ; each of them pitched camps in four different quarters to keep a watch over the town. They had also similar experiences, and had not yet finished their day meals. They were all absorbed in the discussion of one topic—the ghost topic, and the thought of eating and drinking could not enter their minds.

Mahomad Toki gave them a cordial reception and then asked. "Have you got any new information?"

One of them replied, "No, Sir, all ingress and egress have been very vigilantly stopped, none has got into the town nor has any one been out of it during the time we have been here,—any such case would have been at once reported to you and the person so found would have been arrested and produced here, and we have left instructions to our soldiers to this effect"—

"Why then at this unusual hour—?"

"There has been great excitement among the soldiers and they are unwilling to stay there any longer!"

"Why?"

"Owing to the unnatural ghostly activities. you yourself have—"

"I can't say that I have been terrified ;—but I have been astonished' I can't make out anything."

"Can we rely upon what they say?"

Mahomad Toki made a full and clear disclosure of his recent experience, then added. "There is very little chance of any mistake, when the occurrence took place at day time ?

"No doubt it is a matter of extreme surprise, we wanted very much like to make an inspection of the house."

"Yes, you can easily go, it is known as Marium Begum's palace."

"We don't know which one is meant."

Mahomad Toki was going to ring the bell for his servant, when he suddenly changed his mind and said, "Let us go, I will myself accompany you and take you to that palace."

The five Generals in a body again entered the deserted city. It was little over mid-day, and the sun was most tyrannically oppressing the Universe, and the sombre silence of the scene was only occasionally disturbed by the chattering of birds,—the soldiers in the distant camp were making the usual noise. The five military geniuses were talking to one another in whispering tones. It is a strange irony of fate that the distinguished Generals who did not care a fig for their lives, and who risked their lives in the thickest of the fight at any moment were overawed and benumbed with a sense of fear due to supernatural causes! They were literally shaking with fear at the name of the goblins. Who can explain why humanity is always in fear of the evil spirits?"

While they were advancing towards their destination, Mahomad Toki told them that he had made a very careful and minute search of all the houses and rooms in the town. in fact every nook and corner of that

town experienced the rigour of his minute search but no where could he find any indication which could give him a clue to these unnatural occurrences. He had just described to them his wonderful experiences a little while before.

The subordinate Generals cast vacant looks towards their commander and uttered, "No doubt, it is extremely wonderful.

Gradually they reached their destination—the Marium Begum's palace. The main gate was still lying broken, Mahomad Toki entered the Court-yard followed by the four subordinate Generals. The mighty and brave heart of Mahomad Toki was palpitating with fear, and gathering up all his mental strength, he entered the garden,—the four Generals following him.

This time no sound of any description greeted their ears—pin-drop silence reigned all around! One of them remarked, "We can't see anything here."

Mahomed Toki in a half audible voice said, "Quite strange."

For a while they five remained standing there, when one of them suggested, "Let us enter the room and see what is there."

They all entered the room. The big palace without any inmates was in sombre, dead stience. They then went upstairs; the same silence continued, one of the Generals remarked, "Judging from the condition of the house, it appears that some one lives in this room."

Mahomad Toki answered, I was also under a similar impression, but I doubt very much if there dwells any human being in any part of this dilapidated city.

"What does the Moulavi say?"

"He says that except the old Omrao and his servant and maid servant none dwells in the town!"

"No doubt it is extremely wonderful. They all waited for a long time in that house, but they did not hear any sound of any description, when one of them asked their commander, "You did not make any mistake, we presume?"

Mahomad Toki argued, "Had I been there alone, I could have explained it away as a mistake, but I had with me more than a hundred followers there is no possibility of a common mistake on the part of all."

They nodded assent saying "Quite so."

They all returned after a while, and the commander asked them, "What do you now advise?"

"The soldiers and servants and all the members of the staff are unwilling to stop here any longer, even for a day.

"Can't help, we can't move a pace without the permission of His Majesty.

"The more so, as we have not yet been able to ascertain whether Shahajada has actually concealed himself in this place.

"So far as I have been able to ascertain, it seems to be beyond doubt that there is no other human being living in this town except those already mentioned.

"But we have not yet been positive about it ; very probably the Emperor will laugh it into scorn and disbelief.

"Oh certainly.

While engaged in the conversation in the above strain they reached the main gate and were surprised at what they saw ; they found that the soldiers were busy preparing to depart. They were packing their bags and baggages, and loading the bullock carts with their articles ; the horses were being made ready, and from all directions tremendous noise filled the air. They could easily understand that the soldiers were preparing for their departure after breaking up the camp.

All the Generals and their commander were filled with an extreme sense of surprise at this unusual event. Mahomad Toki's face turned pale,—he said, "It seems that they have been flying away without permission.

The Generals remarked "Impossible." Just at this time a Mogul cavalry officer approached them and made due obeisance. From his very appearance it appeared that he had ridden with all possible haste,—his young, heroic face assumed a red hue. He drew out a letter from his breast and made it over to Mahomad Toki. It was a letter from the Emperor. The letter ran as follows :—Mahomad Toki, Mansabdar of ten thousands soldiers ; please accept the good wishes of the Emperor. Shahajada Parvesh has been defeated ; Mahabat Khan and Bhim Singh are preparing themselves

for the invasion of Agra. You must immediately on receipt of this letter start for Rajputna, I shall personally be at Fatehpur Sikri before dusk at any cost.

The cavalry officer had instructions to circulate among the soldiers the news that the king had ordered the immediate breaking up of the camp and accordingly he obeyed the orders. No doubt the news was received with extreme exhilaration by the soldiers, and with great alacrity and joy, they were preparing themselves for their departure from this haunted place, and for this unexpected act, they sent their homage and sincere thanks to the Almighty Father and sincerely believed that their residence in that town would have ended their lives being lost in the hands of the supernatural beings!

The Generals retired to their respective camps without any further remark, made themselves extremely busy in the preparation of the return journey. Mahomad Toki could not find time to take his meal—he at once rode upon his horse as state business of the most serious importance was to be performed, which could not brook any delay. The call of duty made him forget every other affair of life,—not a minute was to be lost! In a moment, the history of India might take a different turn,—a small speck of cloud was visible in the sky. The very stability and existence of the Mogul Empire were at stake! Where was Shahajada Khurum?

None could even find time to think over the situation in half an hour's time the deserted city of the Fatehpur assumed its former appearances.

CHAPTER VII.

ON THE EVE OF THE BATTLE.

The history of every land has its fair share of mysteries and conspiracies. But for nearly ten centuries, the throne of Delhi, has been the subject of innumerable wars, incessant intrigues and open and secret bloodshed and murder in a way unparalleled in the annals of the world. Conspiracy succeeded conspiracy and war succeeded war in endless confusion. The poor ryots succumbed in millions to the ravages of famine and plague, and those that survived were victimised by robbers and marauders. Then there was the Militia whose depredations had gone on unchecked for centuries. Security of life and limb became a thing unknown. Under the great Mogul, Delhi and Agra were transformed into dream-land by the erection of magnificent palaces and beautifully laid out gardens. There was a barbaric profusion of gems and jewels. The sweet scented attar, roses of Damascus, the best wine of Shiraj and the houries from all parts of the world literally flooded the Capital. But behind this grandeur and magnificence—this vast display of wealth and luxury—lay grim murder, fornication and adultery; a fair flower sheltering in its heart the venomous aspic. The imperial inscription ran on

the walls of the Delhi palace-gate "Is there heaven on Earth? Find it here, and here and only here, Oh son of man." *Vanitas vanitatum!*

The Mogul Durbar in fact had all the glories of paradise but none of its quiet happiness. In an atmosphere of intrigue, where no one was sure of his life—who would be happy? The great Jahangir let himself float adrift on the sea of pleasure. His royalty was vested in his spouse—the great Badshah Begum—the light of the world—Nurjahan. This certainly did not please his nobles. But no one would dare to express his dissatisfaction aloud. Till at last, as we have seen two of the most powerful Mansabdars openly broke loose and wanted to set up Prince Khurum on the throne at the very life time of Jahangir.

It came about in this way, Nurjahan who got scent of the plot ordered Raja Bhim Singh to take charge of the Subah of Gujrat and wanted him to proceed there immediately. But Rajah Bhim who was the greatest friend of Prince Khurum never started for Gujrat. He left Agra at the head of his troops and with his devoted band of Rajputs declared himself against the Badshah. Mahabat, commander-in-chief of Jahangir's forces also joined him with a vast army.

Nurjahan had kept the Prince Khurum under surveillance. One night the Prince slipped away from the palace and since then nobody knew where he was. But of these people became sure that he was not in the camp of Mahabat or Bhim Singh.

The eldest son of Jahangir, the dissolute and worthless Prince Parves startled at the very name of battle, But he was the heir to the throne and it was his duty to protect his own. Therefore Nurjahan tore him off from the embrace of his fair damsels and sent him to the front. The poor Prince, much against his will found himself marching against the enemy, but not without those whom he regarded the greatest blessings of life. He carried along with him quite a regiment of fair girls to beguile his weary hours and drank in oceans. Poor wretch ! Nemesis all the while was coming nearer and nearer.

Nurjahan knew Parves to the tips of his finger. She accurately conjectured the Shahajada's character and surrounded him with the ablest generals she had. But even they did not know what a horrid conspiracy was going on.

With five thousand soldiers Parves encamped himself at the very gates of Rajputana, near the camps of Rajah Bhim and Mahabat. Around him the ablest warrior of the Durbar spread their camps.

The Badsha sent Amber and Marwar to the aid of Parves but instead of joining the Mogul army they encamped at a distance. They waited watching from a safe distance the course things would take.

The camp of the Shahajada was unrivalled in its splendour. Innumerable retainers with gorgeous liveries richly caparisoned horses and elephants added a touch of colour to the scene. The tents were made of the cost-

liest shawls of Ajmere with hangings of purest gold in wrought with jewels and priceless kingobs. The great Mogul always carried his Delhi heaven with his person. The fairest flowers of Turkistan, the dainty rose-coloured Persian maid and the soft lascivious beauty from Bengal—the veriest fairies on earth which composed his seraglio accompanied him on his marches. Even on the very eve of battle, you would find them in the midst of gayest revelrie—

When music arose with its voluptuous swell,

Soft eyes looked love to eyes that spake again.

It was the feast of youth and pleasure everywhere—
even in the very gate of battle.

The Rajput camp presented a striking contrast. Small trees covered the hill side. The hardy Rajput soldier had tied his horse to the tree and himself encamped under its protecting shade, luxury was unknown to them. Dainty dishes rich spirits, attar and roses, wine and women were conspicuous by their absence; the half-burnt *Jow-roti* and *Chana* formed their staple food.

Things were slightly exaggerated in Mahabat's camp. He also was a Rajput but was since converted into the Islam faith. But he had the heartiest dislike for the luxurious life led by the Moguls. The chiefs of Marwar and Amber did not know what to do. They had taken up their quarters at a distance. Both the belligerents watched them with interest. Maharaja Gaja Singh of Amber was the right hand man of Jahangir. Excepting

the great Mahabat he was the ablest warrior on the side of the Moguls. Mahabat having left the Mogul camp, he was all in all there, and had in fact become a second Man Singh, his great progenitor whose fame he had equalled. But no one knew what side the redoubtable Gaja Singh would take. The Moguls were in a state of great suspense. The united forces of Bhim and Mahabat did not amount to more than ten thousand men. The Moguls on the other hand were fifty thousand strong. If Mewar and Amber joined with the Moguls there would not be the least chance for Prince Khurm's supporters. But the intrepid Bhim Singh cared very little for odds. He was determined to fight till he lost, all his followers on the field,

It was night. Maharaja Gaja Singh was deep in thought within his camp. He saw in prospect the Mogul throne tottering. Before him the grave outlook of a desperate war. No one knew what would be the issue. The whole fabric of Mogul supremacy might crumble down any moment. Perhaps Prince Khurum might succeed and in him the Mogul line might continue. But if the Prince according to the report was dead, then the victory of Rajputs would certainly lead to Karna Singh becoming the suzerain of India. All these thoughts came crowding in his brain.

Suddenly a soldier stepped in and announced, "The Prince of Mewar."

Gaja Singh was in the utmost bewilderment. What may this mean? He looked blankly at the man who

said again, "Bhim Singhji of Mewar waits for Your Highness."

Gaja Singh never expected this. The house of Mewar was unquestionably the head of the Rajput houses and as such claimed precedence and honor. It would not do for a Rajput to be lacking in respect to this great house. Gaja Singh stood up and said in all haste, "Go and bring him before me in all reverence."

Bhim Singh made his appearance—a haughty youth, unschooled in the ways of good breeding, he did not know what to do and striding up to the middle of the room, he stood stock still and looked vacantly at the gray-haired chief of Amber. Gaja Singh took the hand of the Prince in his own and with great courtesy made him sit on a couch and said, "Prince of Mewar, it is a signal honor to be visited by such as you. If you would let me know your pleasure, I would try my best in doing your bidding.

Raja Bhim answered, "My only object in coming to you Maharaja Saheb is to ascertain your intention as to the present wars."

CHAPTER VIII.

WHEN GREAT MEETS GREAT.

After a minute's silence Gaja Singh rejoined, "I have promised to aid the Badsha and a Rajput's word is not lightly broken."

Then Bhim Singh spoke up firmly, "Then you are determined to join the Moguls in this war?"

Gaja Singh said, "You should have noticed Prince that I have not as yet joined the Moguls."

"If that is what you have decided, why not crown your servile instincts by joining them at once?"

Gaja Singh had a cool and level head on his shoulders. He kept down the angry report that was escaping his lips and slowly spoke out.

"Of course there is a reason. If this battle was between the Badsha and any foe of his I would not have waited till now to decide my party. But in this particular instance all that we can see is an open quarrel between his two sons. Some hesitation therefore is natural in choosing sides. This will explain my inaction till now."

The hot blood of Raja Bhim was surging high all the time; he could ill subdue his wrath and hissed out, "What led you then to come all this distance ready for fight."

"The pleasure of the Badsha."

"Or rather Nurjahan's orders."

"They mean the same thing."

"Are you not ashamed to profess yourself a slave to this woman? Shame upon your Rajput blood." A cloud passed over the face of Gaja Singh. He was musing and for a few minutes said nothing. Then slowly he asked, "What does the Prince Bhim ask me to do?"

There was no compromise in his tones as Bhim Singh cried out, "Either fight for the Mogul as his slave or—" here the Prince stopped for a minute.

"Or" repeated the Maharaja of Amber.

"Or leave the field at once."

"Is it Rajput-like to leave the field of battle, Prince?"

"Then fight."

"Yes, I will fight."

Bhim Singh was blind with anger. He was feeling blood course through his veins and without any exchange of civilities, he left the camp at once. If this haughty Prince had so much tact and prudence as he had courage and boldness—had he the patience of a true diplomat and with sweet and humble words asked the help of the chief of Amber—the history of Mogul rule might have been written differently.

Gaja Singh did not at all like the harsh and peremptory tones of Raja Bhim and feeling himself grossly insulted, broke up his camps on that very night and joined the Moguls.

At morn the battle began. While it was yet night,

the Moguls under Byram Khan and Rajputs under Maharaja Gaja Singh attacked the Rajput encampments.

With the return of Bhim Singh from the Amber camp, himself and Mahabat had held a council of war, and passed orders that the soldiers should hold themselves ready for defence. The Mogul army was unpleasantly surprised when it found the Rajputs ready to receive them. The battle raged on in terrific earnest. It was valour and tact fighting against untold odds. Both sides strained their utmost and the carnage became appalling. No pen can describe that scene of horror—the cries of the wounded and the dying, the heaps of blood-besmeared dead, the wild yell of horses and transport camels—in short it was terrible and the dim twilight atmosphere added to the horror.

All the while that this grim carnival of death was going on, the Shahajada was drinking to the dregs his brimming cup of pleasure. In his camp, the half-naked houries were still displaying their voluptuous charms to the notes of merry music. Even the terrific din of war had not penetrated into their riotous orhy and they were still in the midst of most uproarious scenes of lust and sensuality when the clamour of war, now too near reached the ears of the bacchanalian troupe.

Shahajada was lying drink-sodden and stupid on one of the spacious velvet ottomans. Even the boom of guns did not raise him from his stupor—he was unconscious to the whole outside world. Suddenly the

music and riot stopped, the terrified women all looked at each other's faces. They were pale and civil with terror. The enemy were in the distance and the Shahajada was lying stupified with drink.

The noise of the fight came nearer and nearer. Men were howling and flying at each other's throats like brutes. All their ferocious and animal instincts were aroused. The sight passed all description.

Then these girls, the danseuse, the female slaves and all these bright houries began to fly. The gorgeous camp of the richest Cashmere shawl with its rich upholstery and furniture, its hangings of gold and its beds of velvet had no more any attraction. The women fled—fled for their dear lives and never turned back. But so fled not one, She was a slave—a mere slave and she remained.

The sight was not uncommon in a Mogul camp. When a battle wavered, the women always sought their own safety. And our readers should not at all be shocked. Very few of these women had really any love for their situation. Most of them were cruelly treated and no one had any will of his own. It is natural that at the first opportunity they tried to escape from a fate which was not at all to their liking.

But this girl, she did not fly. She stood erect and looked as if she were the avenging angel. With her lips pressed, her teeth set in rage and a wild fire coming out from her eyes. she looked at the prostrate Shahajada before her. She was of unequalled beauty, in the prime

of her youth and did not at all look like a Bandi whose apparel she had on.

A few minutes she looked at Parves, with that terrible look of her. Then with a swift hand she brought out something from the folds of her dress and mixed it in the golden wine cup of Parves. Her eyes were lit with the fire of hell. For a minute the charming fair face wore an expression of terrible malignity and she cried out, "At last Oh God, the day of retribution is come!"

She looked around her, strained her ear to hear if any one was coming that way and then perfectly satisfied of their loneliness she approached Parves with the goblet in one hand. With the other she held the thick, curly and black locks of the Prince, now lying prone on the ottoman and raised him to a sitting posture per sheer force. The poor Prince somewhat rudely awakened from his drunken stupor cried with half open lids and arms flung wide, "Wha—what mummery is this my fair one, it hurts your slave, come to my bosom love", then he saw the goblet of wine and said. "The cup, the cup of bliss, come, offer me the cup."

The woman held the cup to his lips and he quaffed off the drink in the winking of an eye,

The next moment he was wreathing with horrible contortions and after a few violent convulsions his eyes seemed to be fixed and startled, he became still and looked at the woman.

Then this woman said, "Ah! You do not seem to know me now, wretch! You have killed my husband

you have deflowered my youth, you have cast a stain on my family and then you in your lordly way kicked me out of your presence. Ah wretch ! Little did you think that Lord and Prince, though you are, you have got to reckon with the fury of a woman's pent-up wrath !"

That terrible poison had already begun its work. Parves was feeling the grass grow over him. A strange cold sensation overcame him. He tried to speak but he could not. He continued in the same fixed stare towards the woman.

The woman went on "You thought you were a Prince and a poor widow was a meet object for your violence. But I did not forget. From the moment you took, out of me per sheer force, the dearest treasure of a woman, thoughts of revenge have been rankling in my breast. Do you think, wretch and rascal as you are, that a woman can ever forgive the man who rudely despoils her of her love, her honor and her only real possession—chastity !"

The Shahajada lay stiff and stark. No words, only a few muttered groans and frothy foam escaped his close-pressed lips. The woman, went on,—

"It is for this hour that I lived ; yes, lived as a mere slave in your harem. It is for this retribution which I knew was sure to come that I waited patiently and long. At last God has brought to me my supreme opportunity and I have at last succeeded in avenging my dead husband and my outraged honor. You shall not live

any longer to oppress the poor and to tyrannise over the weak. Woman's honor is safe from thy hands. Die the death of a dog—the doom you deserve best. The devil will welcome your soul in hell.

The girl rushed out of the camp. At this very moment a loud noise was heard outside.

The battle went on outside, the combatants scarcely knowing that the man for whose throne the fight was, was lying stark dead in his camp. They did not know that Parves and Khurum need quarrel no longer for their father's throne. The Almighty had intervened and Parves had stepped out of the path of his brother and rival.

Up to this moment the fight was well sustained. No party had till now secured any advantage. The sun reached the meridian, still they were fighting. At last Maharaja Gaja Singh proposed to Byram Khan that Parves must be made to appear before his forces. That was the only way left of deciding the conflict. Or else there was no chance of victory.

The Mogul General acquiesced. He ran towards the camp of the Prince to see if he was sober enough to take the field.

In those days victory depended on the presence or absence of the leaders. The head must always be conspicuous or his party breaks off. The commanding officer should always be before the eyes of his men, or they soon grew discouraged and took to flight or fought half heartedly. If the commander had to leave the

field or became wounded or succumbed, his men would at once be routed, Victories of this description, where a field was lost because the commanding General's horse was wounded and carried his rider away from the field, have not been rare in the history of India.

In this case also the presence of Parves was felt to be imminently necessary. The Imperial army was fighting half-heartedly and not doing their best. The Rajputs were making terrific onslaughts. The presence of the Prince would make his men rally and fight with ardour. Byram therefore made with all haste for the Shahajada's camp.

He was rather surprised when he came near the Prince's camp. It wore the look of a deserted place. There were no attendants, male or female, who could carry this message to the Prince. The General could not stop to observe nice laws of etiquette at a moment when everything depended on prompt action. He entered the Shahajada's apartments without being announced. But he stood transfixed as with his own hands he withdrew the massive gold curtains and had a look into the interior of the camp.

CHAPTER IX.

AFTER THE BATTLE.

What Byram saw turned his blood cold. He seemed to be petrified. With startling eyes he looked at the scene of horror all agape.

The scene before him was frightful in the extreme. Articles of furniture, Kinkhob-cased pillows and sumptuous beddings lay all scattered. The Velvet curtains were torn hither and thither. Flowers and garlands, golden scent-cases, musical instruments and wine cups were lying all in a heap. The air was redolent of the odour of wine. It was a scene of desolation. It seemed that every one there had taken flight.

But the Shahajada was there. He was reclining on a huge bolster. His face was distorted as in pain. His whole frame was pale and rigid. One glance was sufficient to convince Byram that the poor fellow was no longer in the land of the living.

It was a sight which Byram had not seen even in his dreams. His blood curdled within him. Too terrified to know what to do, he kept standing like a statue. He could not for his life declare that the Shahajada was dead. If this became known the rank and file will certainly break. All the men will take to flight. On the other hand he dared not keep secret such a terrible thing. Besides it was almost an impossibility.

Byram Khan was not long in discovering that the poor Prince had been foully murdered. Such distortion of features was not possible except in death by violence. The Shahajada was stiff as wood. But who has done so terrible a deed? How could he get in through the lines of guards and sentries posted on all sides. Thoughts passed through Byram's brain like flashes of lightning. But he had no time to think. Something must be done and immediately too, or else they would assuredly lose the game. The Mogul soldiers would be annihilated by the Rajputs. The very throne of Delhi would be in jeopardy.

At this time the noise outside reached his ears. He heard distinctly a woman shouting out at the top of her voice. "The Shahajada has been killed—fly for your lives."

If he would wait a minute everything would be lost. He ran out of the tent, jumped into his horse and cried out, "The Shahajada is coming—fight on, men and never fear." Encouraged by his words and his reassuring, the Moguls attacked with redoubtable fury. Their war-cry of *din din* rose above the tumult of the fight.

But alas! All was too late. That slave girl had already worked the mischief. The terrible news of Shahajada's death had been spread from man to man. Even at the very moment when Maharaja Gaja Singh had well nigh routed Mahabat, even when Bhim Singh was overwhelmed by the valour of the Mogul assailants,

the great Mogul army swerved. The Shahajada was dead and for whom were they to fight? The great army swerved and fled. Then like a mad tiger Mahabat began the work of destruction. His soldiers like unleashed hounds were set on the retreating Moguls. Gaja Singh saw the Moguls fly. His great heart seemed to burst with indignation and futile rage. Grasping his sword in bitter wrath he swept off his brow the warm drops of sweat and led his Rajputs away to safety from the field of battle.

The fight which had caused thousands their very lives, the fight which had raged all through the day from the break of dawn to sun-set, in which the Moguls were sure to win, was lost for a mere woman and her idle talk. The Moguls were caught panic-struck. They took to their heels as best as they could—they took to their heels and did not turn back. There was an utter rout on the part of the Moguls.

The camp of the Shahajada which a few hours ago had looked like a pleasure garden was in a few minutes reduced to a desert. The flying Moguls and the conquering Rajputs the pursuers and the pursued helped to demolish it as best as they could. It was robbed and plundered by both.

Byram with some of his faithful followers managed to leave the field and made his way as fast as he could towards Agra. Then Mahabat came and established himself in the camp of Shahajada. Though they had won the field they were not in a mood to

enjoy their victory. Bhim Singh was mortally wounded, there was no hope of his life. Besides, he for whom they were fighting,—for whom they were wading through this carnage and bloodshed—this pillage and loot, this terrific slaughter—where was he? Where was the Prince Khurum? He was in neither camp. Is it then that he was also shared the unlucky fate of Parves? Are they shedding their hearts' blood for a dead prince and doomed cause?

When Mahabat came and inspected Shajahada's camp he found the Prince still lying stiff and stark. All the valuable articles of his camp had been looted but his body has been left untouched. The costly garland of pearls was still hanging round his neck. The rings of emeralds, rubies and other gems were still adorning his fingers. No one had dared to touch the Badshajada.

Mahabat Khan was a very wise General. After a few minutes' observation of the dead body he formed his conclusions and spoke out. "Well here we have poison. This is not the work of any other person. This is the very hand of the infernal Nurjahan herself. She had been plotting the death of Parves and Khurum from a long period. Had Khurum not taken to flight he would have come to the same end. She wants to keep the throne for her son-in-law Shariyer. But he is even more worthless than Parves."

Mahabat made no secret of his opinions, frankly expressed them to his generals. Every one heard that

Nurjahan had sent poison to be administered to Parves and poison had done its work. The news very soon spread on all sides and people began cursing Nurjahan right and left. But no one knew who had really killed this poor Prince. The Divine and omniscient power alone knows if Nurjahan ever thought of killing Parves. The woman who had killed Parves had not killed him for Nurjahan's sake. But the world at large laid the whole crime at the door of the Badsha Begum.

Mahabat conspicuous for his generosity mad all the arrangements of a funeral and sent Parves's body to be buried at Agra. But all that he had got from looting the camp in provisions, transport and otherwise, he kept for himself and his army. He was in want of provision and these were a good-send to him. After having carefully encamped his soldiers and having looked to the immediate necessities of the army he went to see Prince Bhim Singh. The Rajput hero was on his death bed. He had sacrificed his life for his friend Khurum. It would not be exaggeration to say that they had the same soul between them with different bodies, so great was their friendship.

On seeing Mahabat, Bhim Singh's feature lit up and with a sad smile he said, "So you have won the battle."

Mahabat replied, "Yes, Prince, we have won the battle."

"But wherefore are you sad, why don't you cheer up, comrade?"

"Because we are going to lose you, my brave comrade."

Bhim Singh smiled. He said, "You see friend, there is no better death than this for a *Kshatriya*. Do not grieve for me, I would lay down my life with the greatest joy to hear that my dear friend Khurum had become the Badsha. But alas! I go, but you remain and swear to me by our friendship that you must see him placed on the throne of Delhi.

Mahabat said, "Prince Khurum is now the legitimate heir to the throne of the great Mogul."

Bhim Singa was surprised. "But how? You don't expect Parves to give up his claim. Nurjahan would not rest contented. They would both assert their claim."

"Parves is no more."

"Parves no more!"

With a shout Bhim Singh tried to sit-up on his bed, but his attendants about him gently held him back and he was made to lie down again. The sudden jerk gave him great pain, he breathed a heavy sigh, and after a brief silence spoke again, "Please tell me all."

Mahabat laid before him all that he had investigated and all that he had seen. Having heard all this Raja Bhim grew thoughtful for a few minutes and said, "I see Nurjahan shall now declare herself for Shariyer. General, I go, but you remain and must not forget our compact."

In firm, determined tones Mahabat spoke, "Brave Rajput, you may be not assured, I shall never desert

the causes of Prince Khurum. And allow me to make a prophecy—when Jahangir dies, Khurum succeeds to the throne. But so long as the old Emperor is alive it is not my desire that—

Bhim Singh checked him and cried out, "But then there would be little chance for Khurum."

Mahabat said, "Prince, we spare discuss these things when you come round, I shall not disturb you now with weighty matters like these."

Mahabat was about to go when Bhim said, "Tell Khurum to be careful, his life is in jeopardy."

The Mogul general said, "Those who have him in their keeping will save him with their lives."

"Yes, I know that, but where is he now?"

"I do not know exactly."

Bhim Singh kept quiet for a minute. A smile flickered over his lips and he said, "She is our guardian angel."

Mahabat also smiled and said, "Prince, I should rather call her the avenging angel of the Mogul's. Without her aid we would have been nowhere."

Bhim Singh said, "But up to now I can not make out her intentions."

"Perhaps she wants to become a second Nurjahan."

Bhim Singh panted out, "Oh no, she is old enough to be the mother of Khurum and loves him like a son, General you remain and I go,—remember—

CHAPTER X.

JAHANGIR.

It is quite natural, and in full fitness of things that the circulation of the dreadful news described in the last chapter, created a stir, a horrible sense of consternation in the camp of the Emperor.

The murder of Parves—Shahazada Parves, the heir apparent to the throne of the Mogul Empire was an event most undreamt-of, and the minds of the people were not at all prepared for it. But the news has been circulated to the meanest soldier in the army,—it spread like wild fire in every direction; but none knew the source or origin of this most lamentable news. From the Emperor downwards to the lowest *Bandi*, this terrible news was known, but every one was anxious to know its authenticity. There was a great commotion in the camp, and every one seemed to have been utterly agitated and unhinged! The Queen Nurjahan was a woman of very strong determination, and not to be swayed by any consideration from the path which she was resolved to follow. An ordinary physiologist could not read what was passing in that wonderful mind, and in her case, face was not always the index of the heart. But in the present occasion, the calm serenity of her mind seemed to have been utterly disturbed, and her face indicated

what a storm of mental perturbation was raging in that wonderful mind ! Indeed she was much agitated, her beautiful face assumed grave appearance, her eyes moving restlessly, and even for a moment, she could not enjoy peace of mind, and was passing most restless hours in that richly embellished room of the camp !

Our readers know full well that Jahangir the Emperor was a high-minded man, always jolly and cheerful. He was a man devoted to the pursuit of pleasure and pleasure alone. He very seldom lost the calm composure, the dignified serenity of his pleasure-seeking mind. Even when serious questions affecting partially the safety of the state was presented before him by the queen, he with a cheerful countenance, with sweet smile playing on his lips, disposed of the solution of the subject with the simple remark "Oh my queen, you are here, why do you disturb me ? No doubt it indicated the absolute confidence, the Emperor had placed upon Nurjahan, but it also unmistakably proves the high spirit of unconcern in all affairs of the world ! But to-day Jahangir the jolly was a different man. He was seen to have been absorbed in deep meditation, the natural cheerful expression of his face had gone, and sense of ineffable sorrow seemed to have been depicted on his countenance ! After a long time, and probably for the first time in his life, he threw the cup of wine away !

The Emperor summoned Azaf khan to his presence.

Azaf Khan came and bowed down to His Majesty who in a grave voice asked "What is this rumour? Is it true that Parves has been murdered?"

In a tone of submission befitting the occasion, Azaf Khan muttered forth "Jahapana, no news from the battle field had yet been received."

The Emperor with a frowning countenance cried out "Who the devil circulated this news?"

Azaf Khan submitted, "May it please your Majesty, I am not in a position as yet to enlighten any further, I am making enquiries, but as far as I have been able to ascertain the news has emanated from the queen's quarters! Certain *Bandi* is said to have spread this news."

"Who is she? Bring her to me at once."

"Your Majesty will pardon me I hope, if I say that all my enquiries have failed in this direction, I have asked each individual maid servant, but they all deny having any knowledge of it,—they say that they have not circulated this story."

The face of Jahangir assumed a graver appearance, and for a while, he remained silent. It was known to all that the Emperor was particularly fond of his eldest son Parves. But the outward expression of his face did not betray the deep feelings of pain that was uppermost within. But the people could easily see that his over-cheerful countenance was clouded with the shadow of pain within as a result of which, he was seen to be absorbed in meditation.

The Emperor had absolute confidence in Nurjahan ; not for a day, even for a moment, he allowed the shadow of a doubt to cloud his mental vision, or disturb his mental equanimity, but to-day for the first time of his life an unholy thought of suspicion against the queen seemed to have overtaken his mind. He fully believed and knew that all his wishes and desires relating to everything were identical with those of Nurjahan, who never did anything against his will. He had heard many things about the Prince Shariyer. He knew that Nurjahan, as was natural, was exceeding fond of Shariyer her son-in-law, and as such gave him immense riches and wealth for his indulgence in frivolities, but he never entertained the least doubt in his mind that Nurjahan could go to the length of thinking even to make her son-in-law the next successor to the throne of Delhi. Whenever any question of succession to the throne arose for discussion between the Emperor and his life consort, the name of Parves was invariably mentioned. Jahangir knew that Nurjahan, first of all came to know the terrible conspiracy of Mahabat Khan and Bhim Singh,—it was she, by whose energy and promptness the present military expedition was arranged, and she it was who sent Parves to the battle field at the head of a large army under the control and guidance of reputed Mogul Generals. It was Nurjahan who managed to send the Princes of Marwar and Amber for the assistance of Parves,—and it was Nurjahan who was extremely

anxious to punish both Mahabat Khan and Bhim Singh for their conspiracy against the state, and it was Nurjahan who sent Ajit Singh to unravel the mysteries of Fatehpur Sikri ; particularly to trace the whereabouts of Prince Khurum and the present movement of the Emperor with his son Shariyer to the battle field was entirely due to her promptness of action ! Jahangir thoroughly believed that all these movements of Nurjahan pointed irresistibly to the conclusion that they were meant for the advancement of the cause of Parves,—but to-day suddenly the news of Parves' death filled his mind with ineffable suspicion ! There was one more reason for this suspicion. If the cause of this mysterious murder was not at all known to Nurjahan from before, how was it that the news emanated from her quarters ? No news had not been received from the battle field, how then was one to account for the circulation of this blood curdling news ?

Jahangir was a man endowed with extraordinary intellectual powers and common sense, and this set him a-thinking ! Was it to be taken that the rumour was true which occasionally assailed his ears ? He could place no credence upon it for a day ; is he to believe that Nurjahan was inwardly, secretly, sedulously planning a conspiracy to place Shariyer on the throne in place of Parves ? Was it the main reason which prompted not to send Prince Khurum away to an unknown place ? Was he to persuade himself to believe that such a good queen was privy to the conspiracy for

the murder of his beloved son? The very thought made him shudder, and all his hairs stood on end, and an involuntary ejaculation burst forth "No, no, it can't be, Nurjahan cannot be such an infernal wretch?"

For a long time the Emperor remained silent, his countenance assuming a grave composure. Azaf Khan could not move an inch, and placing both his hands on his breast, he remained standing like a motionless statue with his head downwards.

All on a sudden, after a long pause, Jahangir in a steady voice interrogated "Have you sent any one to Bairam Khan in the battle field for correct information?"

Azaf Khan submitted "Yes your Majesty."

Just at this time, a soldier appeared before the Emperor and after making due obeisance submitted "Mansur Khan has just come from the battle field and wants an interview with your Majesty!"

The king most eagerly said "Bring him up to me at once."

In a moment's time Mansur Khan, a Mansabdar over two thousand soldiers, made his appearance before the King and bowed in the usual manner. He was almost gasping, his whole body covered with dust from head to foot;—apparently he rode with the utmost expedition without taking any rest on the way. He appeared to be extremely jaded and was gasping for breath and with some difficulty remained standing before His Majesty.

Jahangir frowned and demanded "Go on, relate what has happened."

Mansur Khan related the story in obedience to that demand, gave a detailed account of what took place in the battle field—from start to finish, but only withheld any information regarding the rumour that had received currency among the rank and file of the army!

Jahangir was a silent listener all through, but at the end of the narration, in a terribly sombre voice asked for wine, the order was immediately carried out. The Emperor drank to his heart's content, and returned the cup to the valet attending. All present were benumbed with a sense of consternation, as if something serious was about to happen! This strange attitude of Jahangir was not exhibited before. To-day all on a sudden, his better self appeared, and he was quite a new man. The low, gay frivolities in which he used to indulge were suddenly shaken off, and his mind became full of ideas befitting his royal position. His eyes became suddenly radiant with a heavenly glow, and a sense of indescribable strength depicted on his countenance. From the very day Nurjahan became the Empress, Jahangir kept himself absolutely free from anxieties and troubles connected with the state. He never passed any order himself, but that duty was delegated to the queen. But to-day he was a different man. In a dignified sombre voice he ordered "Send message to Fatehpur at-once, Mohamad Toki

must join Bairam Khan with his whole force—and——"

After a long pause, he in a subdued but firm voice said "And——I must personally go to fatchpur—go"

When all those present were about to move, the Emperor asked Mansur Khan "Go,—start at once for Bairam Khan's Camp;—where are the women who followed Shahazada to the Camp?"

Mansur Khan in a low voice answered "Jahapana, when the Mogul soldiers stopped fighting, those women ran away in different directions——."

The Emperor with a frowning countenance thundered forth "They can't be dissolved into thin air. Tell Bairam Khan in my name that those women must be sought for and traced out, and be sent to me by any means with the least possible delay, go at-once. My orders must be carried out."

A sense of ineffable, indescribable consternation seized upon the minds of all present there. They never found Jahangir in that mood. They silently made due obeisance to the Emperor and left the place with all possible haste!

For a long time, the Emperor was pacing to and fro listlessly, evidently something very serious was revolving in his mind. No doubt the bereavement of a son told heavily on his mental constitution, and our readers might remember that Jahangir was particularly fond of that unfortunate Prince Parves, and in this case the shock was very great. His whole frame was being

consumed by sense of anger, not upon any body else but upon himself, and a sense of shame came upon him for his serious dereliction of duty. He thought within himself in the following strain "Had I been a dutiful father,—if I had been a little more careful about the education of my son, if I had kept a watchful eyes over them, certainly they would have been different men. However, no good will come out of repentance. Jahangir was so long sleeping so to say, he suddenly awoke to consciousness."

Jahangir then called to his presence the chief commander of his forces and passed the following order "Break up the camp at-once, in half an hour's time, I want to start for Fatehpur Sikri."

In a moment's time, the news—this decision of the king reached Nurjahan, and her countenance assumed a frowning appearance. Since the time Nurjahan occupied the high position of the life consort of the Emperor Jahangir, she was all in all, and even the Emperor did not venture to pass any order without consulting her beforehand. Nurjahan fully understood that he made a mistake ;—a serious blunder, how it would turn out heaven alone knows.

CHAPTER XI.

EXECUTION GROUND.

The order referred to in the previous chapter promulgated by His Imperial Majesty was circulated in a moment's time throughout the Mogul camp, and the whole camp instantaneously was set on a great commotion. From every corner of that gorgeously decorated magnificent camp went forth yells and excitement in all directions, as if the whole camp was set ablaze. No pen can adequately describe the wild excitement and chaotic disorder then prevailing in the camp of the great Mogul Emperor Jahangir!

The Emperor did not wait for any body!—His anxiety to hurry up was simply indescribable, so much so, that His Majesty did not even seek for an interview with the queen who was so long the guiding angel of his life. The king ordered his favourite elephant to be ready for immediate start fully caparisoned. Our readers are expected to know that we are referring to Golam Mahammad the favourite elephant of Jahangir. In a very short time Golam Mohammad appeared before His Majesty fully caparisoned and richly bedecked with jewels. The Emperor with the greatest expedition put on his military dress; this was after pretty long time. In the twinkling of an eye, so to say,

Jahangir was seen upon his favourite Golam Mohammad surrounded by a large number of cavalry soldiers as his body-guards. He at once called to his presence Azof Khan and ordered him to start immediately for Fatchpur Sikri.

The Emperor directed his steps towards Fatepur, and the Generals with all possible haste followed him after breaking the camp. None waited for the permission of the Empress Nurjahan, whose sense of humiliation and shame can be better imagined than described. A little while before the whole Mogul world was lying prostrate at perfect ; not a fly, so to say, ventured to move an inch without her permission ! Her marble white countenance crimsoned with rage and a sense of mortification seemed to have gone deep into her mind. The queen, without uttering a single word got into her palanquin.

Our readers who have followed us from the beginning of our story must have observed omnipotence of Nurjahan in every sphere of life. She was all in all without any one to match her powers ;—but today the very camp in which she was a resident was dissolved without giving her the honour of a consultation as to its propriety and wisdom ! The Emperor who was no better than a slave to her desires and wishes, practically left her in the camp without a word ! The events of her past career appeared in a moment's time in her mental vision, and never before, since her advent into Mogul Court, she was so openly

outrageously insulted!—a combined feeling of shame, humiliation and indignation quite overpowered her mental strength, and she felt utterly disconsolate.

After travelling some distance, Nurjahan asked the bearers to take her to the camp of Shariyer. Even now there was none to dispute her power or rather to disobey it and accordingly the palanquin-bearers brought the palanquin before the gate of the camp of Shariyer. There was some commotion even in the camp of this lubricious Prince, who most unwillingly had come to the battlefield against his will;—in fact that pleasure-loving Prince was most reluctantly forced to give up the pleasures of his harem and to start on this troublesome expedition. But even in this military expedition, he followed his other lascivious habits and was beguiling the hours in gaities and amusements. But all on a sudden what it was? What for this unusual hurry-scurry, this excitement and commotion? What for this sudden preparation for the breaking up of the camp? None of the inmates had prepared for it, none of them has finished his meal, everything was in a state of chaotic disorder! Why this sudden and unexpected order? Shariyer was passing his hours even in this camp of the battle-field in merriment and frivolities, in low dissolute pleasures in company with women of ill fame! But his own camp is going to be broken up by the order of the king! In a state of uncertainty, nor being able to understand what it was all for, Shariyer felt utterly

disgusted ;—but the order of His Majesty must be carried out, there was no way out of it ;—so in spite of his desire to the contrary, he was making preparation to start for Fatepur Sikri with the Mogul army, when Nurjahan suddenly appeared before the entrance-gate of the camp of this voluptuous Prince !

Our readers must remember that the position of the Prince was entirely due to Nurjahan to whom he owed every thing. In fact he could not move an inch without the permission of the Empress Nurjahan. The Prince, seeing the palanquin of Nurjahan, at once ran to the place. The queen opened the door of her vehicle, and the figure which she presented before the Prince, quite puzzled him, and in a state of bewilderment and surprise he fixed his steadfast gaze upon that wonderful face of Nurjahan ! He found to his utter amazement that it was only a shadow of that wonderful, beautiful face !

Nurjahan asked "Have you heard any thing ?"

Shariyer's immediate reply was "No, I have not."

The fact is that he did not or could not know any thing. He had not the capacity, rather not the inclination to hear any thing which did not concern the pleasures of his life. If by the strange irony of fate, he would have been the ruler of India, if the destinies of this vast Empire would have been entrusted to his care perhaps, the history of India would have been differently written, perhaps the famous Taj Mahal, one of the wonders of the world, would not have been there, and

the pages of history would not have been disgraced by the inhuman atrociously savage conduct of Aurangzeb! Perhaps—it is not an unlikely supposition—the Hindu Empire would have been founded out of the ruins of the dying Mogul Empire, for our readers know full well that at that time neither the English nor the French had set their feet on the shores of India!

The reply of the Prince was quite anticipated, but it utterly disgusted the queen, who with a frowning countenance slowly said "On some very urgent state business we are going to Fatehpur Sikri—immediately; you need not accompany us, return to Agra at once."

This order was quite unexpected, but it hit to his mind, and he was almost jumping with pleasure, and in a state of wild excitement, he cried out. "Oh my god, how kind and merciful you are. Oh queen, you are really my mother!"

Nurjahan with a terrible frown depicted on that heavenly countenance ordered her palanquin-bearers to get on. In the mean time half the force of the camp have started for Fatehpur Sikri, and Nurjahan followed them;—the Emperor had started long ago. The Prince Shariyer; in the mean time directed his steps towards Agra with the whole whoredom and harlots following him! Azof Khan with other distinguished generals of repute followed the Emperor towards the direction of Fatepur Sikri, none of them could know that Shahajada Shariyer had bent his step towards Agra! It was better for the Prince, as well as for the queen, that

the secret movement of Shariyer was not known to them, for its timely disclosure resulted in serious consequences ! For our readers will please see and think over the situation ;—Perves had been mysteriously murdered, prince Khurum's movement could not be traced, and the Emperor himself was away from Agra. Taking advantage of this strange combination of circumstances, it was not impossible that Shariyer with help of Nurjahan would declare himself to be the Emperor at Agra !

After receiving instructions from the Emperor Mahommad Toki did not wait for a moment at Fatehpur ; and started with all his military force towards Rajputana in order to reinforce Bairum Khan. By this arrangement, those who were in charge of the duty of taking Salabat Khan, Mahommad Jan and Hamida to the Emperor fell into a difficult position, for the fact that the General Mahommad Toki had to leave that place in a great hurry under the orders of His Imperial Majesty without making necessary arrangement for their swift despatch to the Emperor, and consequently Subadar Kasim Khan with fifty Mogul cavalry was left behind in a state of embarrassment what to do with the three prisoners so providentially placed under his custody !

What to do with these three prisoners ? Should they be carried to the Emperor in his camp or kept in that place of Fatehpur Sikri, where the Emperor would be soon coming as he had already started for the place ? Under these circumstances, it was absolutely

useless to drag them down to the camp of the king. When the Subedar was thus discussing in his mind the best way of dealing with these three men, one of the soldiers under him, apparently a shrewd intelligent man, submissively suggested, "Subedar Shaheb, may I humbly beg to remind you that our general at the time of leaving this place passed an order for severance of the heads of these prisoners from their body?"

The Subedar suddenly cried out, "Yes, yes, what you are saying is all right, now I remember it, but I have no such order regarding the life of this old man."

The soldier said "You need not puzzle yourself about that; you needn't be so scrupulous, what's the good of dragging those burden any longer? Finish with them."

The Subedar objected saying "How can that be, it may bring me to a very difficult situation afterwards!"

The soldier said, "Allow me to remark that you are overscrupulous, in this hour of disorders, when every thing is in a topsyturvy state, who would bother himself about these three insignificant persons?"

Subedar with a grave and sedate countenance nodded his head and in a low voice said, "No, no, you don't understand, it may end in the loss of our own heads! We don't know the reason why the Emperor has ordered for their arrest."

The soldier said within himself "I know that, none else, we may tell our readers that this soldier is none else than Gaharjan in disguise. When all those left

Fatehpur in a great hurry, Gaharjan did not move from the place. He was determined to do away with the life of Salabat Khan and his servant and maid-servant by any means. He knew many things which were not known to the Subedar, but which, he by the nature of the circumstances could not explain to him, consequently he replied to the Subedar "Let us then take them to the Emperor's camp."

Just at this time Subedar cried out in a tone of surprise, "Who is he? When he saw to his astonishment that a horseman was galloping towards him with all possible haste he could command. The soldier jumped down from his horse and in a gasping voice cried out "Subadar Kasim Khan."

The Subedar advanced towards him and said "Yes, I am Subedar Kasim Khan."

The cavalry man just put before his face the famous brilliant ring with the name of the Badsha Begum inscribed upon it, and demanded "Can't you recognize it?"

The Subedar in a terrified mood placed the ring on his own head and in a low, submissive voice said "The command of Her Imperial Majesty this humble servant is ever ready and willing to obey."

In a grave and dignified voice the soldier said "Her Gracious Majesty has been pleased to order the immediate release of this old gentleman with both his servant and maid servant—"

The soldier who was so long advising the Subedar

to take the life of the old man and his servants cried out interrupting. "It is impossible, such an order can not be emanated from the Badsha Begum."

The cavalry soldier without paying attention to that interruption said in a firm voice "Subedar, know from me this man is known by the name of Gaharjan, he has personated a soldier of His Majesty by concealing his identity? His Imperial Majesty has been pleased to order to take this swindler a prisoner to Agra, with the least possible delay. Shahazada has returned to Agra, and the Badsha Begum is soon returning—"

But the cheat in disguise cried out "It's all lie!"

In a tone of sarcasm, the cavalry soldier cried out "Subedar Shaheb, it shall be my painful duty to communicate to the queen that you are not willing to obey her command. Her Gracious Majesty has further intimated that Shahazada Khurum is coming with a large army in this direction, any delay would result in the wholesale capture of you all."

Gaharjan interrupted "I know Badsha Begum had lost this ring long ago, it was in the finger of her favourite handmaid Julekha,—"

The cavalry soldier burst into a feigned fit of laughter, and then said, "Subedar, may this swindler false personification still be in your company? I want to know if you are at all prepared to act up to the command of her Majesty."

Kasim Khan, a man never credited with sound, strong

common sense considered himself to be in a very awkward position, and after a little hesitation said "Who is there on earth so bold as to disobey the behests of His Imperial Majesty? I must bow down to that."

"Well, let them be off" demanded the horseman in a determined voice. Perhaps you know that any one antagonistically disposed towards him is sure to lose his head.

CHAPTER XII.

BIMAL SINGH.

Gaharjan threatened the Subedar with all sorts of possibilities in the event of his acting otherwise than his instructions. He was foaming with violent rage; but finding that it was of no avail, like a vile sycophant, he flattered him in all possible ways, but dullard Kasim Khan could not act otherwise as he saw with his own eyes the famous ring with the name of the queen Nurjahan inscribed on it, and the order in the name of that queen had been communicated to him. So he turned a deaf ear to all the alternate supplications, entreaties and threatening of Gaharjan, whom he tied up with a strong rope on the back of a horse, and left the place immediately. The cavalry men with Salabat and his two servants remained standing there, so long Kasim with his followers were within sight,—all of them gazing towards the direction they were moving. After they were out of sight the horsemen again burst into laughter which went on unceasingly. The old Salabat in a grave voice returned, "We have not yet reached the period when we can indulge in laughter and merry-making with impunity."

The soldier returned "I can't help laughing 'at the sorry plight into which both Badsha Begum and her spy

voice said "So long you have been here, so long I am under your protection, I see no reason to fear."

The old Salabat returned. "So long we are alive, we must see that none dares do any harm to a single hair of thy noble self. Pray, move on, if you have any thing to communicate to me, or if I want to send you any message or information, this Dulali will be the medium. Pray, don't tarry a moment more."

Bimal Singh cast a searching glance upon the monkey-shaped creature, and in a clear voice said. "Then you will be my Dulali also."

The utterance of the above expression went deep into the heart of Dulali, and even her monkey-like face full of mud suddenly assumed a crimson countenance,—an electric current seemed to have been running in her veins, she closed her eyes and seemed to have found every thing enveloped in darkness,—for a while she forgot her very existence. After sometime—so long she felt her as if in a trance—she opened her eyes, and found that Bimal Singh had gone away.

The cloud of dust was gradually nearing the city, and it was conjectured that within half an hour's time. His Majesty will be in the city with the whole Mogul force at his back, Not a moment was to be lost! Salabat Khan moved towards a distant village with Hamida, and the monkey-shaped Dulali lost herself in the ruins of the city of Fatepur. Mahammad Jan entered in a house with hurried hasty steps. Some five minutes elapsed, but he did not turn up! After

sometime an old Maulavi of the Mosque attached to that house came out and said, "I see the Emperor has come almost close to this town."

Bimal Singh, as soon as he got into the ruined city of Fatepur, he entered the residence of old Salabat. He found the main door wide open,—not a human being was to be seen there. He passed room after room with indescribable anxiety, almost reached the back side of the building, when with extreme anxiety and eagerness, Lulia like the fairest fairy, like a cherubim came running towards him and demanded gasping "My grand pa, my grand pa—"

Bimal Singh in order to remove her anxiety with which she was being pressed down with a smiling countenance assured her, "Lulia, my darling, the angel of my life, why do you get so very nervous, pray I, be not anxious, there is none on earth who can touch a single hair of your grand-father's head."

Lulia added, "And—and Hamida,—Mahammad Jan—"

"The Moguls have released them,—the story is a very funny thing."

"Pray, tell me the fun all about."

Bimal Singh with a smiling countenance narrated the whole story relating to Gaharjan's miseries. All the while Lulia was indulging in merry laugh ;—at the end of the narration of the story, she said, "We can live secure, we rather hope to live safe and secure in this place, undisturbed by any one else."

Bimal Singh said, "One having the better experience of this place, will never dare to inhabit this place haunted by ghosts and goblins."

Lulia exclaimed with a sigh of relief,—“A veritable relief. What a nuisance it was !”

“I was detained here so long on account of this nuisance ; otherwise I would have made my escape elsewhere for fear of my life” observed Bimal Singh.

Lulia looked at Bimal Singh rather anxiously, remarking at the same time,—“Why should you leave this place ? Nobody can ferret you out here.”

“Do you want me to be your hanger-on all my life then ?” returned Bimal Singh.

“How a hanger-on ?” demanded Lulia.

Taking Lulia by the hand and drawing her towards himself Bimal questioned “Will you be really sorry if I leave you ?”

At these words Lulia’s eyes became filled with tears.

“Oh yes,” returned Lulia in an indistinct choked voice.

Now Bimal Singh drew Lulia towards his bosom and showered kisses upon her ; this was too much for Lulia and so her eyes closed themselves.

“Should fortune ever smile on this poor self, I will leave a token of this my love which would be second to none in this universe,” re-assured Bimal Singh.

All these persistent appeals to the Goddess of love did not enter into the ears of Lulia ;—she had lost herself in the excess of the sentiments of love !

After regaining her consciousness she demanded, "Pray, tell me, give me your word that you would never forsake me in your life, pray, tell me I am dying."

Bimal Singh in a firm, resolute tone of assurance said, "Lulia, my darling, the angel of my life, take it that even the hand of death can not sever you from my bosom ! You are all ever mine."

For a while both of them remained silent ;—both of them were plunged into the sea of love ! No human pen can adequately describe this heavenly virtue : it is rare in this world :—it does not require any description in language, it is simply indescribable, beyond comprehension ; it is a rare commodity uncontaminated by any dross or worldly feeling ! it is a blessed gift of Heaven !

After a long pause Lulia said, "Then they won't disturb us any longer. Why do they come to torment us here ? What have we done to incur his displeasure ?—we have never offended His Majesty."

Bimal Singh smiled away the queries and assured the love-ridden girl, "Lulia, my darling, you are a simple creature of heaven,—you need not bother yourself with this subject, it relates to high politics, leave its solution to the wise head of your grand father."

"Pray, assure, that they would no longer come to disturb the peace of my *Dada Mahashaya*. I very much take it to heart ! We now live like so many criminals hiding ourselves from their gaze ! My Grandpapa can't get his bread in due time, he can't

baths in time? What an irregular life he has to live! He is suffering a good deal!"

Bimal Singh a long and heavy sigh and then in a grave voice said, "There is no way out of it, darling this time the Emperor himself is coming to torment us, for what, Heaven alone knows."

Struck with a sense of utter astonishment and surprise Lulia ejaculated, "Why the Emperor himself is coming? Pray, enlighten me on the subject, don't keep me in the dark, I am dying."

Bimal Singh said, "He alone knows, how am I expected to know his mind?"

Lulia was muttering within herself, "The Emperor himself is coming, why is he coming? What brings him up to this place? Is it for the assassination, execution of my dear Grandpa? Oh! Heaven what—what then—"

Again a current of tears came flooding her both eyes, it then began to trickle down her holy face! She was the eye-ball of her Grand Father; she loved with all the ardour and impetuosity she could command. Bimal Singh again dragged her close to his bosom and said, "Lulia, you need not be anxious for the life of your Grandpa;—if necessary, I am ready to purchase his life by my own."

Lulia in almost inaudible voice gave out, "I know that."

At this time tremendous noise began to assail their ears. Bimal Singh with a feigned smiling countenance

said. "The Emperor has arrived, I am present, let us go up and see him!"

Lulia in a tone indicative of extreme fear ejaculated, "If we be noticed and detected?"

Bimal Singh with a confident smile said. "We by the grace of our Guru Behari Charan be dissolved into the air; there is no chance of our detection."

The terror which had overtaken the mind of Lulia greatly subsided rather disappeared and with a smiling face she said. "Let us go then as you desire, I have never seen a Badsha, I very much like to see him, how does he look?"

Bimal Singh again said smiling, "Exactly as I look like."

Lulia's face went crimson, she bowed down her head and in a tone of modesty not unmingled with rebuke indistinctly said "What nonsense."

CHAPTER XIII

TERRIBLE NEWS

The Emperor Jahangir pitched his camp round the deserted city of Fatepur Sikri. His Majesty then passed the following orders upon his Generals,—“Just pitch your different camps encircling this city,—mind, none should be allowed an entrance to the city without my distinct permission. Moreover, if you find any human being in this forsaken city after careful search bring him up to me”

One of the Generals slowly muttered forth, with a trembling heart while scratching head, “Jahapana,—Badsha Begum—”

The Emperor frowned, and after a while in a grave and solemn voice said. “Her order must be carried out at all events”

The Generals,—none of them ventured to make any further utterance,—they retired to their respective places in order to prepare themselves for the proper execution of the command of His Majesty. The soldiers became extremely busy in the preparation of putting up camps in all directions and as a matter of consequence great hubbub and noise filled the air. The Emperor entered the richly decorated camp with all the magnificence befitting the occasion, and asked the

valets attending him to bring up the wine vessel,—he further ordered, “When Her Majesty has taken sufficient rest request her in my name to favour me with a visit.”

We are all proud of the civilization of the present day, particularly its material aspect, we get astonished at the promptness with which engineering works are done now a days. But our readers will please remember that in the days of the Mogul Emperors less promptitude was not exhibited in those matters. In the camp of the Emperors, when out on war, it appeared that an unforeseen supernatural agency was at work,—as if a magician has managed every thing! In the course of an hour, the dusty deserts round the city of Fatepur was converted into a beautiful picturesque city! As if a magician by the use of his magic wand has done all these things,—has accomplished this miracle,—beautiful rows of camps were arranged in symmetrical order, between which ran beautiful roads making access to these camps,—all these things seemed to have been the result of a deliberate plan, which in the present-day-civilization would have taken months to prepare,—water carriers began to water these streets with sweet scented rose-water, the fragrance of which was spread in all directions ;—the most exciting, encouraging sound and music of war was replaced by the sweet music which appeals to the asthetic, and effective side of our mind, for all sorts of high class musical instruments played their respective parts!

The most handsome-looking Bandies of different nationalities, with one common similarity of youth were moving from this camp to that with beautiful articles of luxuries and food in their hands ! There was indeed lack of any mark which could induce an observer to take it to be a military expedition ! Who on earth could be led to think that the Mogul Emperor was out on a military campaign ? It is wonderful, and every thing on the Mogul camp was wonderful !

Jahangir was just taking a sip of the stimulating beverage of the rest wine then discovered, when the valet attending made due obeisance and submitted, "Jahapana—in obedience to your Majesty's command, the Maulavi Shaheb has been brought down from the deserted city of Fatepur Sikri,—and he has been waiting at the door to receive your Gracious Majesty's command."

The Emperor was comforting himself after the day's tedious journey by reclining upon a soft round-shaped velvet-covered pillow and was about to take a sip, when on receipt of this information, he got up and sat erect, and a little while after commanded, "Go, bring him hither, rather send him, none else to follow. I want him alone."

Our generous readers will kindly pardon me if I narrate a historical fact, which might not be very necessary for the proper understanding of the main plot of our historical romance. The Emperor Jahangir was not a devout Musalman of the out and out, rigid,

orthodox type. He had no natural predilection for Mahamedan bigotry, moreover, he did many things not sanctioned by the strict decorum of Mahamedan religion. He was most viciously addicted to drinking to which every true follower of Islam took serious exception, and consequently he was not well-disposed towards the Maulavis as a class, and they in their turn were not satisfied with the Emperor and whenever opportunity occurred they preached against him before the public.

The Emperor personally knew the Maulavi of Fatepur Sikri who occasionally visited the Durbar. It was the said Moulavi who gave every necessary information regarding Fatepur Sikri. Moreover, the Moulavi had to pay occasional visit to the court for his own necessity, viz., to take his monthly allowance from the Emperor. Though not himself a very important personage, but by attending circumstances, he was given an importance not uncommon. He was principally in charge of the deserted city ;—he was particularly responsible for the proper upkeep and regular management of the mosque and the graveyard of the late lamented Selim, From the very commencement of the Emperor Jahangir's reign this Maulavi has been there ; none rather very few could give the exact time when he came to Fatepur Sikri and from which time, he was placed in charge of the so called administration of that place ; and the Emperor himself had no correct idea about it. The people of that generation only

knew that an old Maulavi had been living in Fatepur Sikri, and beyond that they could not enlighten the enquirer a whit more!

The old Omrao Salabat Khan was tired of this world. Being desirous of living a pious and simple lonely life with no further ambition to goad him, he prayed to the Emperor for the use and occupation of a humble house in that deserted city, and the Emperor was kind enough to grant his modest prayer. Every body knew that he was living a pious, simple life in solitude of Fatepur Sikri, devoting himself to the culture or true religion since then he had been there. He was very seldom seen outside the limit of the city, for whenever any occasion arose, which demanded his personal attendance at the royal court, he invariably had it done through kind offices of the Maulavi who was ever kindly disposed towards him. It seemed that on principle he was never out of the city of Fatepur Sikri,—for a pretty long years, he was never found outside the limit of the city, and none could point to a date when he was seen outside.

No doubt the Emperor Jahangir did not bother himself with the administration of the state affairs, but he was fully informed of the fact that the deserted city of Fatepur could only boast of two citizens, viz., old Salabat Khan and the Maulavi? The king was first told by the Empress Nurjahan that Shahajada Khurum had fled from Agra and hid himself in the ruins of Fatepur Sikri,—in order to test the correct-

ness of this rumour, the shrewd and intelligent queen had sent Ajit Singh, the Prince of Amber to reside for sometime in Fatepur Sikri. But for this course of action, Nurjahan did not take the counsel of any one, neither she cared to consult with any body, for our readers must know that she had a degree of confidence in her own great intellectual powers.

When Nurjahan confided the secret to her husband, Jahangir laughing answered, "Whatever you have done, is all right, there is none on earth who can take exception to your action or conduct. You are the Goddess of fortune of the Mogul Empire." The fact was that the Emperor Jahangir did not seriously believe that any thing serious had happened by the sudden disappearance of Prince Khurum from Agra. He explained it in his own mind by ascribing it to youthful frolic—some tendency common to his age. But subsequently he had to change his views, for he now fully realized that a secret conspiracy for the very throne he was upon, was being sedulously hatched by a section of the people,—he fully understood that there was an under-current of disaffection somewhere. At first he was disposed to explain the conduct of Mahabat Khan and Bhim Singh with reference to their natural individual proclivities, for he knew that Bhim Singh was a haughty and imperious youth with whom the subtle cunningness of Mahabat Khan was combined but beyond it he did not doubt much. But to-day the murder of his most favourite son so mysteriously by

the hand of an assassin quite unhinged his mind and disturbed his mental equilibrium. His ever-cheerful heart never gave way to grief, but to-day it was over-ridden by a sense of sorrow for loss of his beloved son Parvesh, which he never experienced before. His mind was in a state of suspense ;—was it all due to the machinations and intrigues of Nurjahan? Could it be possible to believe that for the purpose of making Shariyer the successor to the Mogul throne, Nurjahan the guiding angel of his life had done these terrible deeds? Is she the prime mover, the leading spirit, the guiding star, the initiator of this diabolical plot? This suspicion, this not unnatural suspicion, goaded the Emperor to a life of activity of his younger days, and to-day he is not the lewd, licentious king but Jahangir the Brave General—the Emperor of India.

The maulavi after making due obeisance remained standing, when the Emperor, with due respect to his position requested him to take his seat. The old Maulvi, with his white beard flowing downwards, presenting a picture of grave angelic sage took his seat at a short distance from the Emperor, and then said in a sweet, clear voice, "Jahapana, to-day I am alone in this town keeping a watch so to say——"

The Emperor interrupting, "Why,—where is Salabat Khan? Does he no longer live in Fatepur Sikri?"

The Maulavi in a tone of modest submission said, "He was here till this morning ;—when Mansabdar

Mahammad Toki took him a prisoner with his servant and maid-servant——”

“Why, by whose command ?”

“Jahapana, this humble creature cannot enlighten your Majesty on this point.”

“Where are they now ?”

“I am sorry, I can't enlighten your Majesty a whit. I venture to suggest that the General Mahammad Toki had taken them with him——”

“No, no, I don't think, with prisoners, he has gone to the battle-field !”

“Then I submit it is not unlikely that they had been killed.”

“What do you say ? The old.—very old Salabat Khan had been killed ? The revered head of old Salabat had been severed from the body ? By whose command he has done so ?”

“I am not at all acquainted with anything regarding this, it is a mere surmise. Hearing the advent of your Majesty, I have been waiting at the gate. It would now be very difficult to live in this deserted city alone, I pray that your Majesty may be graciously pleased to make over charge to some one else, and relieve this humble servant once for all.”

The Emperor was rather unmindful, as if in a fit of reverie, and very probably the pretty long speech of the old Maulavi passed unheeded ;—the king called his attendant and the valet entered appearance and

bowed down. The king asked. "Has Azof Khan reached by now?"

"Yes, your Gracious Majesty!"

"Bring him up at once."

The Emperor slowly turned towards the face of the Maulavi;—for a long time he cast a searching enquiring look upon the face of the Maulavi as if to make a study of what was passing within him,—he then slowly broke out, "Maulavi Saheb, I have great respect for your devotion to religion and virtue, and I am sure my confidence is never misplaced, you are ever obedient to me, loyal and faithful, and a sincere well-wisher of the Mogul Empire.—"

The Maulavi bowed down his head in modesty, reverence and gratitude and said, "It only bespeaks your Majesty's unbounded kindness towards me!"

In a rather grave and strong voice, the Emperor added. "You are an old man, devoted to the culture of religion, and a true follower of Islam."

"I beg to repeat, it only bespeaks your Majesty's excessive kindness towards me."

"I believe you never tell a lie, and particularly you would never be false to me!"

"Pray, pardon me,—this tongue shall be, this foul tongue shall be the food for the dog—"

"Then tell me plainly, if there is anybody else in Fatehpur Sikri besides your holy self, old Salabat and his servant and maidservant,—I want to know this from you, I don't mean only the present time, was there ever

at any time any human being besides those I have enumerated above."

"Jahapana, take it from me that there was none else within my knowledge either before or now in this deserted city. I further add that had there been any such human being, certainly it would have come to my knowledge ;—for the old Salabat Khan never conceals any fact from me, and the residence of any human being in this forsaken city, if it was known to Salabat, must have been communicated to me.

Jahangir smiled a smile of scorn, as if he could not at all understand the logic of the Maulavi's homily and then said "Maulavi Saheb, what you say is at least meaningless ;—you are a pious devotee of religion, you never bother yourself with the affairs of the state, you shun politics on principle, but it is not likely that Salabat Khan is also quite innocent of politics. It is not impossible that he is a party to a conspiracy regarding the future succession to the throne of Delhi, and if so, he would not divulge this secret to you."

"Jahapana, your Majesty's surmises are well-grounded."

"Then I may take it that Salabat Khan could very likely conceal some persons in the ruins of this city without your knowledge?"

The old Maulavi unmindfully playing with his long white beard submitted, "Your Majesty's order is to be obeyed ;—this humble servant of your Majesty never bothers himself with politics and is not in a posi-

tion to make any authoritative statement on this point ;—religion is his element."

Again the Emperor cast a searching longing look towards the Maulavi sitting before him and then demanded ; "Please explain what you know of this ghostly affair ?"

This time the Maulavi, in a rather clear, distinct voice cried out, "May it please your Majesty,—it is all nonsense, all false !"

Jahangir smiling asked, "What do you base your conclusion upon ?"

The Maulavi in a more emphatic and loud voice ejaculated, "Impossible, the place which is sanctified by the presence of the graveyard of the late Prince Selim, the place which can boast of a mosque like the one in the holy city of Mecca, and where prayers are regularly uttered five times a day, can not be a haunting place of ghosts and goblins ; it is a sacred place."

The Emperor again smiled and said, "I don't like to detain you any longer, there is no good in wasting your valuable time, I shall be personally present there very soon, and I like to pass two nights there in order to see what is this all fuss for, whether it is the doing of a ghost or a man, whether any supernatural agency is at work."

So saying the Emperor pointed his finger towards the liquor-vessel, upon which the Maulavi Shaheb cried out, "Toba, Toba," closing his both ears with his hands.

The Emperor Jahangir burst into a fit of low

laughter and said, "better leave me, I am much pleased with you."

The Maulavi left the place after showing proper respect to the throne ; the Emperor took a sip from his inspiring beverage ; just at this time, all the tremendous noise which had been agitating the camp so long suddenly stopped, as if by a magical influence ;—very probably something very unnatural of very great magnitude had occurred.

CHAPTER XIV.

WHAT NEWS IS THIS ?

There was no wonder that from the different camps of such vast legions of soldiers located outside the deserted city of Fatehpur Sikri tremendous noise of various descriptions would rise up to the sky ! In that magnificent military expedition, headed by the great Emperor General Jahangir himself, there were thousands of horses, elephants and camels with innumerable camp attendants sending forth their terrible noise of different descriptions producing a babble of jargon of such horrible character which can better be imagined than described ! All of a sudden this tremendous noise stopped as if by a preconcerted plan which could only be devised by some supernatural agency, and pindrop silence began to reign supremely all around ! Its grandeur and importance were ten times heightened by the contrast it produced and the Emperor was very naturally much agitated. Strangely enough the natural, ordinary noise of this stupendous conglomeration of soldiers suddenly after the silence, thousandfold increased, so much so as if they thought the world was nearing its end ! The Emperor with an anxious heart stood up ;—he was fully convinced that something very unusual must have happened, he could not hit upon a right conclusion !

Was it likely that was a sudden surprise—attack upon the camp? The heroic mind of Jahangir prompted him to come out and investigate the cause, when at the entrance of the camp, he met with Azof Khan.

Jahangir felt a little bit abashed at the exhibition of mental nervousness, and in a moment he regained his self-composure and returned to his royal seat. He cast a grave look towards the face of Azof Khan and demanded, "What noise is this, Azof Khan?"

"Jahapana——"

So saying Azof Khan began to scratch his head as if in a state of indecision what to communicate. The Emperor with an angry, frowning countenance thundered forth, "Nonsense, what means this silence? What news in the camp?"

Jahangir himself is the interrogator, not Jahangir the voluptuous king, but the young Prince Selim, developed into manhood. Azof Khan never saw him before in such a terribly royal style. He fully apprehended the consequences which would result in any delay in giving a suitable reply! So in a tremulous voice of submission he said, "Jahapana, a very lamentable news,—a very terribly shocking news!"

In a tone of uncommon firmness, Jahangir ejaculated, "Do you take me to be a woman, you ninny?"

Azof Khan with his head downward, in a murmuring voice said, "Jahapana,——Jahapana——"

Moved by a feeling of intoterable indignation, from out of the stupid delay of Azof Khan, and a curiosity

whetted to the fever heat, the Emperor losing his self-control, stood up and striking the ground under his feet, in a thundering voice cried out, "Jahapana—Jahapana, what nonsense are you, you booby, ninny, fool,—I know what you say ; what more ?"

Azof Khan in a indistinct, inaudible voice said, "Shahazada—Shahazada—dead !"

Jahangir in a shrill voice of anger ejaculated, "I know that, already ; and your noble self has perhaps heard it just now ?"

Azof Khan was still hesitating, as to what to do ;—upon which Jahangir lost all self-control, his royal face went crimson with rage, and in a loud voice of extreme harshness cried out, "You haven't any more to communicate, leave me off at once, be off you good-for-nothing drone !"

In a tone of supplication Azof Khan in a low voice of tremulation said, "Pardon me, your Gracious Majesty, I don't speak of Shahazada Parbesh !"

With eyes expressing of extreme wonder, Jahangir enquired, "Who do you mean ?"

With folded arms, Azof Khan submitted, "I mean Shahazada Khurum !"

Jahangir's countenance suddenly assumed a horrid palor, he regained his seat and in a slow voice asked, "Shahazada Khurum !—Shahazada Khurum !—it is a news no doubt ! What do you know ? Go on, look sharp ?"

"Shahazada Khurum is dead !"

"And how ?"

"His dead body has been found at the main gate of Delhi in a naked condition——"

"Who gave you this information?"

"The Subedar of Delhi has just now sent this information;—a cavalry officer has just arrived with the news,——"

"What more?"

"The Subedar has sent the corpse of Shahazada Khurum to Agra to be interred there!"

"Send information to inter both the Shahazadas in one place,—go at once."

From the attitude of Azef Khan it seemed that he was anxious to communicate something more to the Emperor, but could not venture to speak it out. He was accustomed to deal with Jahangir the frivolous, pleasure-loving ruler of India, but to-day a terrible figure in the person of the king quite terrified and unnerved him, and he left the place in the greatest possible hurry!"

Jahangir was left alone for a moment; he sighed a deep sigh of sorrow which seemed to have come from the inmost recesses of his heart; and in such hours of excessive mental agony he betook himself to help of that celestial ambrosia, that heavenly beverage. He poured a sufficient quantity of liquor in a golden vessel and sipped down the whole contents at a single sip! An involuntary expression came out of his mouth, "I am myself guilty,—I am alone guilty in this affair,—I am alone responsible for it and none else,——but to lose

two sons in one day is not the lot of many in this world !”

“A sweet, sonorous voice from behind exclaimed, “I can’t believe it.”

The Emperor was not at all prepared for this unexpected remark ;—driven by a sense of extreme surprise, he turned backwards, and his eyes were greeted with a scene, the nobility, serene beauty and grandeur of which are simply incomparable !—The curiosity and surprise were enhanced to an intolerable degree ;—the Emperor found to his infinite happiness and surprise, agreeable surprise, that a feminine figure of incomparable beauty shedding lustre and light all around was standing there ! Our intelligent readers need not be told that she was Nurjahan, the queen of queens, the Empress of India, the Empress of her sex ! Oh ! how grand and ennobling she looked in that posture ! The Emperor even in his grief forgot himself for the time and cast a steadfast glance upon that celestial figure of majestic beauty now standing before him !—It was the figure of a tall, rather stouter woman, possessing the *embonpoint* of her sex of riper age, and whose charms have acquired the luxuriant voluptuousness of maturity. An observer would have noticed that the bosom was of large proportions, but still preserving the firmness unmarred by its fullness, and that at all events it has preserved somewhat of its virginal whiteness. Her shoulders were well filled out—slightly rounded—and beautifully sloping, her waist was of a symmetry, properly

consistent with the amplitude of this magnificent bust and the large projection of the hips. Her arms were sculptural massiveness, but admirably moulded, round—plump and dazzling whiteness, and her hands were perfectly ravishing with their long tapering fingers and their pellucid almond-shaped nails artificially reddened. Such a figure of uncommon beauty, with sweet smile playing on the lips presentend a scene which is simply indescribable ; each undulation of the face while smiling was shedding sweet lustre, like moonbeams all around ! It was alone possible for the possessor of such extraordinary virtue to guide the destinies of the Mogul Empire although originally of poor origin !

The Emperor could not take away his gaze from that statue of beauty :—for a while he was as if in a trance, and the evil feeling of anger and suspicion which arose in his mind against Nurjahan vanished away, and in a tone of deepest sorrow, he asked, "Have you heard all this ?"

The queen effected her entrance from the back door of the camp, and she could easily overhear the conversation that passed on between her brother Azof Khan and the Emperor, and advancing forward she emphatically repeated, "I can't persuade myself to believe it."

Jahangir cast a steadfast gaze upon the face of his noble consort :—Nurjahan took her seat by the side of the Emperor, and with her own heavenly hand poured wine into the golden cup and put it before the

mouth of her lord saying, Jahapana, the lord of my life, the most adorable in the universe, take it, my love, I believe none of the Shahazadas is dead !”

Jahangir returned no reply, but continued rivetting his look upon the gloriously beautiful countenance of the queen. After a while, he slowly in a low voice muttered forth, “Have you heard all about ?”

“Yes, I have heard everything, and after giving proper consideration to the subject it deserved I am of opinion that none of the Princes is dead !”

The sense of wonder and surprise which had overtaken Jahangir rose to the fever heat and he continued gazing towards his beloved. The Emperor knew full well that of all persons in his court, male and female, Nur-Jahan was the most well-informed, and he himself did not pretend to possess a title of the knowledge regarding the state affairs which the queen was presumed to do. Moreover, he had implicit confidence in the extraordinary intelligence with which that marvellous woman was endowed, and in fact he rightly believed her to be the most gifted human being not only in the royal court of Delhi, but throughout the world. For the above reason, the king, though at first was struck with a sense of surprise, could fully believe that there must have been good deal of truth in Nurjahan’s assertion ;— of all persons Nurjahan was the only one who could give him correct information. Moreover, there was one psychological reason at the bottom. The news of the death of his two sons in one day, gave a rude shock to

his sentiments, and even it was too heavy a blow for his mighty heart to bear! But the words of Nurjahan carried with them a reassuring hope, it brought solace to his perturbed soul, and naturally enough, he persuaded his mind to put faith in the views expressed by Nurjahan. A student of psychology would not fail to see that our minds are naturally prone to believe any story which brings hope and happiness to our minds, but our minds naturally reject unpleasant news even when it carries with it the force and strength of authenticity. After arguing for sometime in his mind, Jahangir asked the queen, "Have you received correct information about what you say? Do you seriously believe that neither Parvesh nor Khurum is dead?"

Nurjahan said in reply, "I am not positive about what I state. I can't doggedly assert the correctness of my statement, but I guess it to be so;—but though I can't vouch for the correctness of what I say, I submit that even my guess very seldom proves false."

"Pray, tell me, how do you come to that conclusion, you can easily gauge the depth of the intensity of anxiety."

"Oh my dearest, lord of my life, I shall disclose to you facts which were not done so before, for the necessity of the communication of those facts to you did not so long arise. Jahapana, had I been ever impressed with the sense of importance of this communication to your Majesty, I would have done it then, and I hope your Majesty does not doubt it!"

"I know it all, my Nurjahan."

"I have got spies all over the land, your Gracious Majesty knows—"

Exhibiting a deal of impatience Jahangir said, "I know that too."

"I shall communicate to your Majesty as far as I have been able to ascertain."

Jahangir remained silent. Nurjahan after a pretty long pause fully narrated the story regarding Julekha, from the very first day of her acquaintance with that extraordinary woman till her mysterious death or disappearance. She did not omit to relate the private intimacy which Julekha had with the famous Gangia, the Panwali, and that with the death or the so-called death of Julekha, the Panwali disappeared i. e. the simultaneous occurrence of both those events. Nurjahan also narrated what she knew about the plot of Julekha and Gangia to place Khurum on the throne with the help of Mahabat Khan and Bhim Singh. Jahangir with rapt, undivided attention listened to the story from the beginning to the end without interrupting the queen by making any interlocutory remark. When Nurjahan finished the narration of her story, Jahangir smiled an affected forced smile which only indicated the deep-seated pangs and despondency within and said, "So long, I was under the wrong impression that there is none on earth who is at all comparable to my Nurjahan in point of intelligence and al! that, but to-day I am painfully undeceived!"

Nurjañan's countenance became clouded with a shadow, a deep sense of humiliation and shame came over her, and in a faltering voice she said, "I confess I have been a little beaten by Julekha in political intrigues, but your Majesty will please see to the end."

With a countenance of feigned smile Jahangir replied, I know, rather believe that in the end you would come victorious. Do you even now believe that Julekha is dead? Take it from me that before her head was severed from the body by the hand of an assassin, she took poison simply to deceive you! The effect of the poison was to give the body of the consumer the exact appearance of a corpse! You thought that she was actually dead;—but the poison-like article which she took does not destroy the life—is it not? Only the body exhibits all the symptoms of a dead body—"

In a tone indicative of deep despondency, Nurjahan answered, "Now I have been rather driven to that conclusion."

Jahangir with an air of confident superiority smilingly said, "An intelligent lady of your stamp and position ought to have been a little bit less credulous on this occasion,—the exercise of a little more of discretion and common sense would have convinced you that in this affair of self-murder of Julekha, there was something behind the veil! How could you then explain the extreme haste and hurry with which the deed was done?"

The indomitable strength of mind, and the proved intellect of Nurjahan felt much abashed at the awkwardness of the situation to which she had been driven, and her timid, faltering reply was, "I could never disbelieve her then."

"You ought to have done so. You know she was the daughter and wife of a respectable Brahmin, and you know the reverence in which Hindu husbands are held by their wives,—the marriage tie, they consider as eternal and as such indissoluble. I for the life of me fail to understand, how could you persuade yourself to believe that a Hindu lady as Julekha was so very happy by serving you as maid-servant even after losing her husband, the dearest lord of her life, and her only darling girl;—the more so as your former husband was the cause of all these miseries; you ought to have disbelieved her from the beginning,"

"I now fully see the deplorable blunder, I have committed, I quite feel it, my lord!"

"Follow me Nurjahan, my queen, you committed a great blunder afterwards, for when you began to entertain doubts as to her fidelity, when you disbelieved her,—when you fully suspected her movements,—in short, when you detected her vile scoundrelism and infidelity, then you ought to have continued your doubt as to motive of her self-poisoning, so hurriedly, or rather the whole affair of self-poisoning. You know that people try to struggle for their life even to the last moment, except when they got disgusted with it."

"I now fully understand it Jahapana, to my shame and humiliation!"

"This Julekha has not died, it is as sure as the rising of the to-morrow's sun! Have you got any scent of her—any information as to her whereabouts?"

"No, your Majesty, not yet. I have engaged one Gaharjan, a very faithful employee under Mushru!"

"How do you know that this Gaharjan, a creature of Mashru, and so yourself too, will prove a faithful one?"

"I never had any occasion to disbelieve him!"

"Such was the case with your favourite abigail Julekha, your right-hand woman, who gave you no occasion to question her sincerity, is it not?"—was the firm and sarcastic reply of the King.

The pride of Nurjahan kissed the dust! She was speechless, for the first time in his life, she³ was so very awkwardly cornered and defeated! In fact some one was defeating her object at every step, the queen did not know what she was doing, and where she was going, but that one knows every movement of the queen, every shaft which the queen was aiming against her, she evades! What an awkward position it was for the Empress of India. In fact she was being defeated by Julekha in every unseen battle she fought with her! This is the first painful experience of Nurjahan's life. She never experienced any defeat in her life in any capacity; her almost superhuman intellectual force was admitted by all, but Julekha accomplished what

none else had done before ! She had now out Nurjahaned Nurjahan !

To make any reply, Nurjahan to-day could not raise her face ;—never before in her life Jahangir talked to her in this strain ! Nurjahan fully understood that to-day a change in the mental constitution of Jahangir has taken place ! Let us all feel for that mighty queen !

CHAPTER XV.

JAHANGIR.

After a long pause, Jahangir in a firm voice of unmistakable clearness said, "Nurjahan, I love you with the ardour and impetuosity of a passionate lover,—more than my life;—this passion on my part is not newly born, I was enamoured of your charm since the day I first saw you;—it is long before I ascended the throne. You know I do not like the troubles and anxieties of the political life of a king, I am a plain simple man, averse to mixing with the troubles and intrigues connected with my kingly life,—to be plain, I am a drunkard given to pleasures and amusements of life! When I found that you are a queen of incomparable, extraordinary intellect, that you are the fittest person to be entrusted with the administration of the affairs of this vast empire, I with a safe conscience, with entire confidence made over the duties of guiding the destinies of this kingdom to you, and I enjoyed peace and pleasure behind the worries and troubles of a kingly life;—I was literally plunged in a sea of happiness;—do you dispute it; Nurjahan?"

The queen felt as if she entered into a new kingdom; she never in her life found Jahangir talked to her in

that strain!—Devoured by a sense of extreme bewilderment, she cast a longing look of surprise upon the face of her lord—not a word passed her heavenly lips! The Emperor, with the same firmness and clearness of voice continued, “My confidence was not misplaced, you proved worthy of the charge I committed to you, for you ruled the Empire with greater tact, intelligence and ability, than I could have commanded, and that was without any help from me—everything went on smoothly and peacefully; but to-day a different state of things exists, the very safety of the Empire is now at a stake, its very foundation is shaking,—why is it so Nur-jahan?”

A burning blush suffused the queen’s incomparably beautiful cheeks—overspread her neck—descended to her heaving bosom—a blush born of wounded vaunted vanity mingled with a sense of self-mortification and self-humiliation, entirely spread over her countenance and in a low tremulous voice which was not fully audible, she asked, “Oh my lord, why it is so?”

In a voice of uncommon gravity, Jahangir continued, “So long you have been acting as a selfless woman;—you had no separate, independent interest save and except that of my own;—infact in every respect our interests were identical, so the empire was being governed so smoothly and without any hitch! But now the circumstances have greatly changed, now you have an independent, separate interest apart from that of my own, and the very moment there was a severence

of interest, troubles of various descriptions began to arise. "Do you deny it, my queen?"

"How can I, your Gracious Majesty?"

"Now my interest points to one direction, and that of yours to another! The interest, the future happiness of your daughter, is now the sole object of consideration in your life, your mind is fully possessed of that one predominant idea! You want to create a new line of Empress;—you long to see your daughter should succeed you, that a second Nurjahan will reign in India after your death;—and this ruling passion of your life has driven you to take every possible step to make Shariyer my successor! Do you doubt it, do you deny it Badsha Begum?"

The deep blush on her countenance deepened, and her whole face went crimson. She fully understood the stupidity of making any denial!—She could not utter a syllable, she turned her face in another direction.

Jahangir went on with the same firmness of voice, "For the above reason, I was rather unwilling to see that your daughter is married to my son Shariyer; but your dogged persistency overcame my decision, and I was forced to sanction it. But I may remind you, my Nurjahan, of your promise to me that you would never attempt to place Shariyer on the throne in preference to my eldest son Parvesh. Do you now deny it, Nurjahan, my queen?"

Nurjahan maintained the silence of a stoic philosopher! She was speechless! To-day Jahangir was

quite a new man, not the voluptuous Emperor of India, but the indomitable hero of thousand battles ! To-day he is the old Selim grown up and developed. There was a time when the stories of his heroism and valour spread from one end of the country to the other, and in this land of heroes, he was considered only second to Rana Protap Singh of Marwar, the greatest and the most valient general ever born ! Jahangir added, "Nurjahan, you are an intelligent woman, you know the character of Prince Khurum, had you not been disposed to place Shariyer on the throne in preference to the eldest brother Parvesh, I am sure, Khurum would not have attempted the throne for himself over the head of Parvesh. Khurum is a Prince made of different materials,—noble, heroic and generous, and by contrast the utter worthlessness of your son-in-law would be brought out in clear relief. Moreover, that worthless Prince has gone to the very depth of degradation by your excessive indulgence. He is utterly unfit for the duties inseparable from the life of a king ; and to my mind Prince Khurum is the fittest and worthiest of all and that his magnanimity would not have induced him to reject the idea of administering the Empire under the guidance of his elder brother ;—he was not ambitious of the throne."

Jahangir sighed a deep sigh of mourning,—after remaining silent for sometime, he again slowly broke out, "Nurjahan, I quite feel that all my words are piercing deep into your heart, but truth is ever ugly. Your,

I should rather say, foolish attempt to place Shariyer on the throne at any cost and at all hazzards your anxiety and eagerness to see your daughter Lalia play the part of a second Nurjahan, had driven general-like Mahabat Khan to the camp of the enemies, and he became determined to place Khurum on the throne! Moreover, I can tell you that when all the distinguished Mansabdars in my royal court would find that you have placed the most worthless Prince Shariyer on the throne, and thus causing incalculable mischief to the Empire, they would in a body turn against you, and would make every possible attempt, at all hazzards, to give the throne to Prince Khurum!—They would go to the length of even sacrificing their life for the attainment of that object!—I can even predict that your own brother Azof Khan would join with Prince Khurum; I can see all this in my prophetic vision!

Nurjahan broke her silence after a very long pause! She could not contain herself any longer and rather unconsciously the expression came out of her lips, "Oh! my revered lord, I am after all a woman, a member of the weaker sex!"

The above ejaculation extorted from the Emperor a forced smile even in the hours of deepest grief, and he remarked, "I am rather fortunate to hear this confession from you, that pride humbled down! Nurjahan, don't take offence, you have set fire, so to say, in the Mogul Court! And as far as I understand, your once favourite abigail has defeated you at every step and

there is no way out of it, and you have no power to put out the fire you have so foolishly ignited? That is the reason why Jahangir has now thrown up his outer self, and has revealed the true man; it has induced him to give up his drinking habits and all the pleasures of his life and has himself assumed the government of the country. He will now devote himself to politics with the same passion and enthusiasm which were exhibited in the other and false side of his life! When every thing will settle down in peace, and the machinery of administration will be in smooth working order, Jahangir will again plunge into the life of happiness and pleasures; and you too will regain your former position, and reign over my dominion, as you do in my heart!" So emptying his surcharged heart, Jahangir dragged Nurjahan to his bosom, and with the vehemence of a passionate lover of youth, he began to imprint innumerable kisses on the rosy cheeks of Nurjahan who in the excess of her imagination unconsciously muttered forth, "This humblest Bandi will die the happiest kissing the dust of your Gracious Majesty's feet."

There was one psychological reason for the exhibition of this passionate love. A feeling of uneasiness was rather working in the mind of Jahangir that he had very sharply reprimanded Nurjahan more than she deserved, that a proud, noble lioness had been mercilessly beaten at a disadvantage, and as a palliative he was rather carried to an excess:—but who on earth could remain unmoved at the sight of so mysteriously charming

a lady as Nurjahan, standing in the position of a wife?

When the intensity of feeling exhibited in the grosser side of our nature greatly subsided and the prompting of softer desires satisfied, Jahangir poured wine into the cup with his own hand, and after consuming it smilingly said, "For your sake, I shall drive away Khurum a vagabond in the country, but know it for certain that after my death, he will come back as the Emperor;—none would espouse the cause of Shariyer."

Nurjahan looked up to the face of Jahangir after freeing herself from the embrace of her lover, and eagerly, but with tremulous voice asked, "Then your Majesty also believes that Shahazada is alive?"

Jahangir answered, "I am not positive though, but all the circumstances point irresistibly to the conclusion that Khurum is alive. What I have just heard of Julekha from you led me to believe that she will protect his life from every possible danger, and that she is capable of doing it, for a trifling happiness of the Shahazada, Julekha will move heaven and earth;—this led me to the finding I have just arrived at;—the news of the death of Khurum, the circulation of this news is due to another dodge played by that extraordinary woman Julekha, once your life and soul, so to say!"

"And Parvesh—Shahazada Parvesh!"

"There is no Julekha to watch over the destinies

of that poor, unfortunate Prince, and I am afraid, he has been murdered as reported !”

A flood of tears came gushing into both his eyes, which he with the most utmost effort could ill afford to keep under control ;—for the heart of Jahangir was as soft as that of a simple rustic girl not inured to the intrigues of this world ; moreover, the shocking news of the sad death of his eldest son, of whom he was particularly fond, quite unnerved and paralysed him.

We are not in a position to guess what was passing in the domain of Nurjahan's mind !—but she could not raise her head to look straight to her husband. There was a pretty long pause, and the queen remained absorbed in the deepest reverie. She was rent by two antagonistic feelings,—one, a sense of shame and humiliation at the thought of so complete a defeat which she encountered in her trial of mental strength with her own maid-servant Julekha, and the other, that she has wounded the feelings of so sincere and noble a husband as Jahangir !—Indeed her corrugated eyebrows, quivering lips, and convulsing bosom evinced the most ineffable anguish ;—never before she had such painful experiences !

Again the Emperor betook himself to drinking. A reader of human heart could at once see what a vehement struggle was going within that mighty, royal frame ;—with a sense of supreme self-control Jahangir said, “What I could gather from you, it seems that you are right,—your suspicion is well-grounded ;—it is very likely

that your Julekha with her whole band of followers has concealed herself in the ruins of this city. It is a very suitable place for the purpose."

With great lagerness Nurjahan ejaculated, "I do firmly believe it."

Jahangir said, "I shall personally pass this night in this place. and shall see what is all this fuss and horror about ;—be it ghosts or goblins, man or animal, I must have friendship with them to-night——"

In a voice indicative of sincere anxiety for the life of the king Nurjahan said, "Whether there be ghost or not, or it might be the doings of that infernal wretch Julekha, or her followers of ruffians, it is not at all advisable for your Majesty to live alone !—For it is not unlikely that the enemies might have formed secret plots—diabolical plots for your noble life !"

"You need not be nervous, my dearest,—to-day I am not the old Jahangir, but the Emperor of India, the most valiant son of Akber the Great."

"Pardon me, your Majesty, I shall not allow you there to be alone, this humble Bandi will be by your side !"

"I know you love me passionately, but to-day I am the Emperor, and you are the Empress, I am your husband, you must obey my command."

Nurjahan in a very plaintive voice of submission asked, "Have I ever disobeyed your Majesty's command ?"

Jahangir with a forced smile said, "I don't mean

that, but it is necessary that I should know positively the fate that awaited both of my sons Parvesh and Khurum ; is not the state of suspense the most painful of all pangs ?

The Emperor called a Bandi and ordered her to bring Azof Khan there. The Bandi ran on errands.

For a long time Jahangir remained absorbed in deep meditation ! Nurjahan did not venture to disturb him ;—she sat by his side and began to fan her lord with a fancy fan of golden handle.

In a short time Azof Khan appeared before His Majesty and made due obeisance. The Emperor ordered, "Send a messenger to Agra at once, with the intimation that the corpses of both the Shahazadas must be immediately despatched to me. They will be buried in my presence. Mind, I shall hold yourself responsible if the dead bodies get putrid or rotten any way ;—necessary precautions must be taken by the use of all medicines suitable for preservation. Go at once."

After observing due formalities, Azof Khan was about to leave, when the Emperor said, "I want to ask you another question, "Where is Ajit Singh of Amber ?"

Azof Khan like a playing doll, turned back and said, "By the order of your Majesty, he has started for the battle-field."

"Have you heard anything of the place in this town where he met with supernatural beings ?"

"He had not himself much experience of this ghostly creatures, but Raghubir Singh, a general under

him, himself an old man, had some painful experiences of that nature."

"Where is it?"

"In the palace of Marium Begum,"

"Very good,—to-night I shall reside in the palace of Marium Begum;—make necessary arrangement with all possible haste;—go at once."

Azof Khan left the presence of the Emperor, who finding that a sort of moodiness has come over his queen said, "Nurjahan, my queen, you need not be anxious on my account; I want to see personally what is all this, I want to dive deep into the mysteries of this ghostly affair!"

In a voice of extreme earnestness and modesty Nurjahan rather lowly said all the while casting a longing look to her husband, "Jahapana, the lord of my life, may I venture to submit a prayer that this humble servant—"

Jahangir interrupting said in a rather resolute voice, "No, my queen, I am sorry I can't see my way to comply with your request."

Nurjahan's countenance became rather ghastly in its unearthly pallor, and with a tremendous effort to subdue the agonising emotions that were raging in her breast, she regained her self-possession. Without uttering a word, she poured that heavenly beverage into a glass and put it before the mouth of the Emperor. Never before on earth, such a sorceress was born in the world!

CHAPTER XVI.

AGAIN THE BEGUM'S PALACE.

It was decided the Emperor would pass the night in the residence known as Marium Begum's Palace. In a previous part of our narrative, we have attempted to give a faithful description of the magnificent building where after so many years of its construction, the Emperor was going to live for a night. The news that king Jahangir would pass the night in the palace where one of the most favourite queens of his great father enjoyed her youth, spread in all direction among the army ! Like wild fire it spread to the remotest corner. There were commotion and excitement everywhere, and the news was in every body's mouth. For want of use and occupation for a long time, the building was not in a fit state for the habitation of the Emperor ;— but every possible preparation was being made to make it so, and as a matter of necessity large number of persons were engaged for the purpose in different capacities ! The beautiful flower garden round the main building which had grown into jungle full of useless weeds and rank vegetation suddenly regained its old pleasantness and beauty ! In the upper storey of the Palace, soft, downy velvet bed had been prepared for the king and the magnificently beautiful room was

illuminated with a brilliance, quite commensurate with the grandeur and the pompous splendour of the occasion ;—indeed, in the shortest possible time it was made worthy of the royal residence of the Mogul Emperor !

Azof Khan after a very careful, minute search, in every creek and corner of the deserted city, could not get scent of a human-being ;—no possible trace of any human creature could have been discovered ! The old Maulavi was living in the mosque known as Selim Sha's *Darga*, and Azof Khan fully believed that he was the only inhabitant there, in fact he could not persuade himself believe that there was a second human soul inhabiting that forsaken city ! Was it possible that Ajit Singh was dreaming,—or is it likely that the whole matter was to be explained by reference to supernatural agency ? Is it all the doing of ghosts and goblins ?

After making every necessary preparation worthy of the occasion, Azof Khan appeared before His Majesty to whom he gave the details of the arrangement. The Emperor made no reply to that, nor added any suggestion evidently well-pleased with Azof Khan's activity. Azof Khan after making due obeisance, was about to return, when the Emperor said, "After my meal, I shall go to Marium Begum's Palace, and wish to pass the night there."

In a tone of modest submission Azof Khan in a low voice said, "The attendants of your Majesty and the soldiers,——"

The Emperor ininterrupting said, "In the inner portion of that residence, I shall alone live only with my faithful eunuch Alam Sha! Place my brave soldiers all around this palace-wall, and see that they keep a strict vigil throughout the night;—if they find any stranger in any appearance, he must be arrested.

Azof Khan in a tone expressive of profound love mixed with reverence, and in half audible voice said, "May I venture to suggest that your Majesty should not alone——"

Jahangir interrupting in a rather loud voice said, "Azof Khan,——I am not a coward!"

Azof Khan did not venture to say a word more;—slowly and silently he retired from the place,

When the night advanced a little,—it is about 9 o'clock, when Jahangir, after finishing his night-meal started for the Marium Begum's Palace with his devoted and faithful servant Alam Sha. For the edification of our readers, we like to say a few words about qualification of this extraordinary man. He was a man of extraordinary strength which is fully commensurate with his extraordinarily developed figure:—a robust, strong-built figure, of inordinate height, with all his limbs symmetrical and well-proportioned. Indeed his very sight struck terror into the heart of any stranger who had occasion to pass by him! Such a commanding, terror-striking figure, when fully dressed with all the pompous splendour of oriental military costume is sufficient to make the heart of ordinary human being

palpitate with fear !—From head to foot, he was attired in military costume !—But even without any military weapon, he was so very powerful by his natural strength, that he could squeeze a man to death without much effort ;—infact to him the word 'fear' was unknown ! The Emperor came out with Alam Sha behind him. He found to his satisfaction that throughout the street brave soldiers of select appearance with lighted torches in their hands had been standing in regular rows, and that the line continued up to the palace-gate. Like so many statues, the soldiers remained standing round the compound-wall—not a word passed from them—besides those torch-holders, there were other soldiers keeping vigil with their swords open, under the superintendence of Azof Khan himself ;—the illumination was as perfect as possible, so much so that the smallest article on the ground could be easily seen as in day time !

The Emperor cast a smiling look upon Azof Khan and very patronisingly said, "Azof Khan, I am highly satisfied with your arrangement, you have left nothing to be desired ;—your arrangement has made the appearance of any ghost, evil spirit, an impossibility ! Moreover if there is any human being lying concealed in the ruins of this city, surely he will not venture an exit from the secret palaces only to be exposed,—rather he will try to conceal himself with more care !

Azof Khan most respectfully submitted, "Jahapana, I have made a very careful search ;—but with my

utmost effort, I could not see any human being anywhere in this deserted city !”

The Emperor with a smiling countenance, which was the outcome of inward satisfaction said, “Very probably, I shall not meet with any one—however, let us be up and doing, you better go, why do you tarry any longer? You need not accompany me, the arrangement you have made for the protection of my life is beyond what is necessary, and what I could expect even—better go to your camp at once.”

Azof Khan with good deal of hesitation in a low voice rejoined, “The order of Her Majesty,——”

“What is that command ?”

“I am not allowed to move an inch, so long your Imperial Majesty is there.”

Jahangir's countenance turned glow with a sentiment indicative of inward happiness, and smilingly said, “All right, obey her.”

Without uttering any further word he entered the palace followed by the commanding personality of Alam Sha with his sword hanging from his waist, and another in his right hand, the dazzling brilliancy of which filled people's mind with terrible fear ! The art of captivating the human hearts were known to Nurjahan, she was an unrivalled adept in that art which was on a par with her superior par excellence in other matters ;—Jahangir with a gladdened heart, with an exuberance of feeling, such as is experienced by a victorious general just from the battle-field, with fresh

laurels in his forehead, majestically moved on repeating again and again in his mind, "Oh ! how passionately and dearly am I loved by the greatest female being on earth—her love for me is sincere, it is not for my position, oh ! how happy am I !"

Although within the compound-wall of the palace, no military arrangement was made, yet the illumination was as complete as it was outside it : there were torches placed in the compound-garden, round the palace itself, in fact for the purpose of detection of any thief or evil doer, it was as clear as day :—but though soldiers were not requisitioned within the compound, they were keeping strict and vigilant watch outside with their swords full unscabbarded and with souls hungry for winning, any military glory !

Jahangir entered the magnificent palace, the pleasure of his illustrious father Akbar. It was a two-storied building only, but most magnificently painted and fitted up. In the downstairs, Jahangir asked Alam Sha to examine very carefully whether all the doors and windows were closed from within.—The Emperor himself after minute examination fully satisfied himself that everything was just as he desired :—the room was most brilliantly lighted, and the examination was conducted without any difficulty. Alam Sha very carefully examined the room and the king after personal verification with the help of the sword, remarked, "None, not even a fly, far from speaking of a human being can effect entrance into this room." In fact the king examined every

particular place of the side-wall with as much care as was possible under the circumstances.

The Emperor's above remark was confirmed by Alam Sha, who submitted, "No, your Majesty, it is impossible."

"Let us go and examine upstairs" so saying Jahangir went upwards, followed by the terrible figure of Alam Sha, his faithful servant and companion now. It was the bed-chamber of that historic Begum Marium, and since then it was so used ;—it more than brilliantly illuminated, indeed the dazzling glare of which was even too much for the Emperor. All the doors and windows were shut up from within, exactly as was the case with hall in the ground-floor. Jahangir himself conducted the examination with more than ordinary precision after it was done by the brave eunuch, and then with apparent satisfaction observed, "Yes, all right, none can come here."

Alam Sha submitted, "Yes, your Gracious Majesty."

The Emperor sat upon the downy velvet bed,—Alam Sha brought near his Majesty the *Albola*—a smoking apparatus—with rich decoration of pearls and diamonds upon it—with sweet-scented tobacco prepared and kept it upon a gold stand, —all the necessary apparatus of drinking were also placed near the king who commanded his faithful servant as follows—"Keep the door of my chamber wide open, you better go downstairs and keep careful vigil all night, look here, you must not

fall asleep, for it is very likely that the day's toil might overpower me, and I may fall asleep."

Alam Sha made signs which indicated implicit obedience, and he accordingly moved downwards. The Emperor leaning upon a velvet-covered pillow, soft downy round-shaped pillow, with *Albola* pipe in his mouth, and with eyes almost shut was thinking about the political affairs of his Empire.

There was almost pindrop silence everywhere, the seriousness of which was enhanced by the contrast it made with the brilliant illumination of the city! The soldiers, being apprehensive of the least disturbance to the rest of the king, kept their watch almost in a breathless state, so there a peculiar kind of sombre silence pervaded the whole atmosphere!

But this unnatural silence was not agreeable to the feeling of the king, his mind was welcoming a confused noise, for the silence carried with it the idea of fear:—but as the arrangement was complete, he had no alternative but submit to the sternness of the circumstances, he then drank a cup to his heart's content which brings solace to agitated minds and made himself more comfortable in his bed.

The Emperor very much liked to pass a wakeful night, but in spite of himself he fell fast asleep the intensity of which deepened with the increase of time!

The king could not measure the length of time he was asleep, but suddenly the sleep left him and he woke up. He found—he felt it—that he was perspiring

from head to feet. A peep sense of indescribable ineffable fear seemed to have utterly overpowered his senses, as if he was trembling in a fit of terror!—A sense of shame and self-humiliation came over him. He tried to remove from his mind this sense of weakness and as a means to that end, he thought of taking a portion of that invigorating beverage, all the while uttering in his mind, "Oh how strange it is, I thought that my age has not told upon my energy and strength but how undeceived I have been—am I dreaming"—so he tried to extend his hand to take a cup, but he could not.

The king then made an earnest effort to get up and sit upon his bed—but alas! he found to his infinite surprise that he had been tied down to the bedstead by a rope, so fast that he could not extricate himself from it even with best effort :—even he could not move a bit! Our readers might very well remember that Prince Ajit Singh was so tied up one day in the same manner in the self-same room!

The condition of his mind can be better imagined than described,—a sense of ineffable fear pressed him down! He argued in his mind, "It can not be due to any supernatural cause, I am afraid that inspite of best precaution, some body must have entered this place! He made an attempt to call out the name of Alam Sha, but he found that his tongue was tied,—his voice was choked within him, moreover, to add to his sense of surprise, he saw before him a scene, the wonder attached to which surpassed his wildest imagination!

The scene was exactly the same which was exhibited before Ajit Singh a few days ago ! The king saw before him that in a very beautifully decorated chamber of the Begum Mahal, a young superbly handsome Prince was surrounded by a number of charmingly fair ladies, all swollen with intoxication ; and that a ravishingly beautiful young lady with the gorgeous dress of a queen was engaged in amorous dealings with the Prince ! Our readers might remember that Ajit Singh saw that the Prince of Amber met with his death after taking a cup from that sorceress but this time, Jahangir found that Prince Khurum himself lost his life after taking a sip from the cup put up to his mouth by that charmingly sweet creature of heaven—all the blood in his veins suddenly stopped running, he was almost bathed with sweating, and in order to get relief he tried to shout out, but no audible voice escaped his lips,—his tongue was parched up—the king had never before experienced such a terrible scene in his life !

All of a sudden this blood-curdling scene changed : as if every thing dissolved into thin air, but the Emperor remained motionless in his bed ! Again as if by a magician's mechanism, the rope with which he was tied down slipped off, and he felt himself free ! Jahangir jumped up and stood erect by his bed-side with his swords unsheathed ! The room was as illuminated as before, indeed in the outward appearance, the chamber did not undergo any transformation ! Was the king dreaming ? Was he wandering in a dreamy land of imagination ?

Suddenly terrible cries of lamentation filled the air ! A sense of bewilderment seized the king with its horrid unnaturalness ! The Emperor with sword open and brandishing it right and left ran downwards :—indeed in such a pitiable condition, Jahangir was never seen to run away for fear of his life ;—he began to run on and on !

The room in the downstairs was full of horrid darkness, and it was evident that the terrible cries of lamentation described above was coming from that direction, nay from that very room ? Suddenly the front door was flung wide open, and the light from torches burning outside illuminated the room. The Emperor found that his valiant, indomitably courageous and faithful servant Alam Sha was running like a frantic, mad man evidently driven by a sense of fear,—the king also followed him with all possible haste !

CHAPTER XVII.

WHAT IS THE MATTER.

The most valiant and intrepid Alam Sha with his robust and gigantic figure came running to the ground with terrible cries of lamentation like a mad man :—at the entrance of the gate, he fell down prostrate with a horrible sound ! The Emperor Jahangir, the valiant hero of thousand battles, in an almost naked state came following his faithful servant all through gasping for breath ! Azof Khan who was keeping a vigil at the main gate of the mansion with his whole force came running before the king with a sense of extreme surprise mixed with fear !—Just at this time another terrible, heart-rending scene was presented before the stage !—Deep cries of lamentation and bewailing began to rend the sky,—gradually the pathos and intensity of it became so terrible that there was no doubt in the minds of the king and others that a large number of persons mainly consisting of ladies were wailing and crying for the immediate bereavement of a near and dear, and strangely enough the sound of those lamentations came from the very mansion, nay the very bed-chamber where the Emperor had been just before ! Our readers will please remember that Mahammad Toki had the similar experiences !

The time and circumstances added gravity and seri-

ousness to the whole scene. It was midnight,—later than midnight—when even the revellers over the wine-cup retire to rest after breaking up the orgies at hand, when the daughters of crime turn their weary steps towards the abode of pollution,—it was a time when the flow of music resounding through the saloons of wealth, rank and fashion, has subsided, when the roseate floods of luxury gushing forth from the joints of gilded shutters and between the folds of velvet curtains have almost stopped,—at this hour Alam Sha, the monster man, lay prostrate making horrible shrieks, and the moanings and lamentations of creatures apparently of the fair sex began to rend the sky!

As if some had immediately breathed his last and the female inmates of the house were moaning and crying in a frantic manner! The night was moon-lit, a little while ago the moon was shining in all her silver purity—the stars were keeping company with the vistas of the night. But suddenly the whole sky was overcast with cloud, and the sombre scene thus created was simply indescribable;—the wailing and lamentations of female human beings reverberated in all directions in the stillness of the night!—Every one was looking aghast at the face of one another, which appeared bloodless and ashy pale; they all felt a suffocating sense of death, as if they were dying by strangulation! And the beauty and the humour of the whole scene is that the vast legion of soldiers were standing like so many motionless statues!

The unexpected spontaneity and suddenness with which the scene was created, also disappeared with the same unexpectedness enhancing the terrible hedious solemnity of the occasion ten times more ! Jahangir cast a fearful and anxious look upon the face of Azof Khan, which bore the marks of indescribable terror—he was shaking like on aspen leaf, and his countenance wore marks of horrid paleness !

Jahangir in a moment regained his self-composure. He quite realized that to make such an exhibition of weakness on the part of the Emperor of India, who ought to be a model to all, was the height of unwisdom and folly—never, never before in his life he had such terribly pathetic experiences !

Alam Sha was lying prostrate on the ground,—the Emperor turned towards his soldiers and commanded. "Drag him, poke him up, very probably he has fallen into a swoon, he is unconscious."

Every one present there was credited with so much of common sense that they fully understood the extreme gravity and seriousness of the situation, so much so, that such a dreadfully strong man, Alam Sha, the terror of the people, had been a victim to it ! The whole Mogul force were terror-stricken, almost half dead with fear. Some of the soldiers, apprehensive of a frown from the king moved up to the monster figure lying prostrate and dragged him a little and raised him up :—he sat up, he was not actually in a swoon, but his senses were utterly stunned, and the heroic countenance of his face

underwent great distortion. The king asked Azof Khan to pour some quantity of wine into the face of his faithful servant, so merciless a victim to probably ghostly activity ;—this timely treatment saved the life of Alam Sha.

Some of the attendants ran to the store and brought a quantity of wine which was poured into the mouth of Alam Sha ;—our readers might well presume that wine was a necessary material in all the movements of the Mogul Emperors.

The application of the intoxication had the desired effect of stimulation which enabled Alma Sha to stand up. Jahangir in a grave, unusually grave voice asked, "Now, relate your experience, I want to hear all."

Alam Sha was still reeling ; he was as if the sport of an infernal hallucination,—the victim of a horrible night-mare. With deal of effort at accuracy, he related the story of his experience of the night, slowly and lowly, punctuated with sobs and moanings. This terribly hideous story exactly corresponded with the description which Raghubir Singh once gave to the world. Alam Sha was still shaking with fear.

The Emperor heard the story with rapt attention, his countenance having assumed an unwonted, serious gravity, said, "Azof Khan, come along, take some ten valiant soldiers with torch lights. I very much wish to ransack the whole mansion to make a thorough, searching enquiry."

The Emperor re-entered the palace with his select

followers. He found the room exactly in the same condition, only with the change that all the lights had been extinguished ; all the doors and windows were in the same condition,—they were closed from within ;—there was no possibility for any one effecting a secret entrance within. Moreover, there was every chance of exposure and detection in the event of any one attempting to scale the compound wall or to effect an entry by any other means for the soldiers were keeping vigilant watch with torches in their hands. Further more, the entire mansion was most brilliantly illuminated ;—to add to the strangeness of the event, there was no mark left showing that it had been visited by any human being, nay any creature on earth !

The Emperor was not a little disappointed, even after a long pause, musing with his own soul he could not arrive at a definite finding. He then passed the following order, "I see, it is useless to make any further enquiry in this dead of night, it will be a fruitless attempt on our part, keep every thing intact ; the sentinels will not be allowed to move from their places. The soldiers will also stick to their respective places. See that without my order no disturbance in the arrangement should at all take place—take care !"

The Emperor came out and got into his *Tanjam*—the magnificently decorated conveyance ;—the bearers with their monotonous sounds ran on towards the camp followed by a large number of well-equipped fully armed soldiers as his body-guards. When the bearers carrying

his Majesty in the *Tanjam* had gone out a short distance, a miraculous sound greeted rather assailed the ears of the king who jumped up on the palanquin when he heard—most unmistakably heard, in a clear, distinct voice, "Jahangir what are you doing, you have been doing injustice to your sons being a victim to the evil working of the sorceress Nurjahan !"

Jahangir made a terribly large sound directing the bearers to stop there, and directed his followers, "Find out atonce, some one has undoubtedly hid himself here, you must on pain of death find it out."

The soldiers, in obedience to his Majesty's strict order, searched the place in every possible way, they caused almost an havoc in the place, but to the utter bewilderment of Jahangir no trace of any human being could have been discovered. The Emperor's face assumed an unusually grave countenance. Never in his life he experinced such overwhelming perplexities :— with a heavy heart, as if a nightmare weight of thought had been pressing him, he again got into the conveyance and ordered, "Go on."

Slowly, with the sound of the bearers a little subdued the *Tanjam* went on. The Emperor said within himself, "Am I dreaming, or moving with my eyes wide open ; can there be any doubt—that it is due to supernatural agency ?"

Jahangir retired to rest, but rest he could not enjoy in his own camp. He could not argue it out from his mind that his recent experiences were not the outcome

of supernatural agency,—that he was not dreaming, that he was in the matter of fact work-a-day world dealing with stern realities, there was no doubt, and that what he saw actually with his own eyes, and which was only in corroboration of the report of the previous visitors, could not have been the result of the preconcerted plan of any combination of human being ;—there was not an iota of doubt that it is something beyond human probabilities, the time, circumstances and the occasion were against it. How could a human being enter the palace which was illuminated by flood of light, it must be due to ghostly activities—the fact of Alam Sha's discomfiture,—Alam Sha who was distinguished throughout the length and breadth of the country for his uncommon bravery, and strength, such a creature must have been overawed by something uncommonly supernatural ! A deserted city is always haunted by ghosts and goblins, and it is very natural that Fatehpur Sikri is a haunted place—but one thing his mind could not explain. Why it is that only the Emperor and his men were victimised in that way ? Why not the old Maulavi and Salabat Khan who have been living in this place for years together are not equally treated with my men ! Why this partiality ? It is certain that they have no such experiences, if so, they must have left the town long ago. What is all this ? What is at the bottom ? My mind misgives me, I apprehend that a grave calamity is awaiting us, to me it seems that I hear the portentous rumblings of a distant calamity,

surely this Mogul Empire will be visited by a catastrophe!

For a long time Jahangir was given to a thoughtful reverie discussing in his mind the several phases of his new experiences, when all on a sudden he seemed to have been disturbed by the appearance of an apparition! He jumped up moved by a sense of fear no doubt, for the region of his mind was full of ghostly scenes, and the most brave mind sometimes yield to that cause of fear! But this time no unearthly being greeted his eyes, he found that the queen Nurjahan with her beauties fully displayed stood before him!

The queen could not enjoy rest in her bed-chamber, she was in fact passing a restless night. As soon as she received the information of the Emperor's arrival in the camp, Nurjahan without waiting for the permission of His Majesty, and even without observing the due formalities, ran towards him with all possible haste, never in her life she felt herself so very disturbed!

The queen bowed down, stood on her knees and implored forgiveness saying, "Jahapana, pardon your humble Bandi, I could not enjoy any peace of mind alone in the camp, and my excessive anxiety and uneasiness have driven me to your Majesty without waiting for permission, pray, forgive me."

This urgent pathetic appeal did not go in vain, for the Emperor without taking any umbrage said, "Sit down." Evidently he was much agitated; he was perspiring. Nurjahan with her celestial hands drew

out richly scented handkerchief from her bosom and slowly touched it over the forehead of the Emperor ; when she found the Emperor a little sober and calmed down, she said, "May I venture to enquire if your Majesty has seen any thing ?"

Jahangir gave a faithful and correct description of the whole story from the beginning to the end without any exaggeration or distortion of facts, for he looked upon Nurjahan not only as the companion of his bed but a faithful and wise counsellor in the hours of necessity ;—all the while the narrative proceeded the fascinating fairy queen was fanning the Emperor with a gold handled fan—her mind was fully occupied with the one thought, and her attention was undivided. But she was a silent listener. When the Emperor finished the narration of the incidents, the queen most respectfully enquired, "From the tenour of your Majesty's description may I take it that you ascribe the whole thing to supernatural agency ?"

Jahangir in a very grave tone rejoined, "I can't explain it in any other way."

Nurjahan in a tone of sincere submission and with all the modesty in her voice she could command said, "I quite understand that it is sheer impertinence to make or rather to venture to offer any suggestion or remark of my own, but this humble Bandi has special claim upon your Majesty's kindness which emboldens her to open her mind and speak it out. For I believe that all these misdeeds are due to the machinations and

intrigues of our enemies, they by some wonderful means have been causing this unnatural phenomena to appear !”

Jahangir with grave earnestness, and in a tone indicative of firm conviction retorted, “Now,—impossible, utterly, perfectly impossible, it is as impossible as the sun would rise from the west to-morrow ! No earthly magician,—and if they be endowed with most wonderful qualities of such a magician—can effect the possibility of such an impossible thing ;—I never had any faith in the spirit-world either evil or good, but to-day I am a convert to that school of believers ;—I am a believer by necessity——”

“In my opinion——”

Jahangir most impatiently interrupting, “Speak out your belief !”

“This city ought to be demolished and reduced to dust and razed to the ground. Everything will come to light then,—whether it is the doings of ghosts or human beings—everything will be clear to our vision.”

“I quite admit the force of your argument, but I can't wipe out the last remnants of the glory of my late renowned father.”

“May I enquire then the decision your Majesty has arrived at ?”

“I am of opinion that these unnatural occurrences have a meaning behind it, it forebodes evil, and I am afraid, very soon my Empire will be visited with a terrible catastrophe.”

“To a brave hero like your Majesty—”

“Nurjahan, you know, I am a man not to be easily agitated ;—there is strong misgiving in my mind that very soon some undreamt evil will befall the Mogul Empire, whether it is due to my own fault or to yours, I don't say any thing.”

The countenance of Nurjahan, her beautiful face went crimson with intensity of feeling. She did not utter any word ;—the Emperor went on, “Perhaps, I have lost both of my sons ! My mind also tells me that the remaining one, the most worthless of all sons—leave us away ! I am afraid I am the last of the line founded by my illustrious ancestor Babar,—the Mogul Empire will soon come to an end—”

In spite of himself tears came in torrents in the eyes of Jahangir, who was after all a human being, and subject to all human frailties and short-comings ! His voice became thick and indistinct. Nurjahan was also deeply moved, but with commendable self-control, and in a tone of supreme sweetness which only became that illustrious queen she said, “Oh ! my adorable husband, master of the universe, the glory of the Mogul reign, should you yield to worldly bereavements, like only ordinary mortals ?”

Jahangir attempted a forced smile and said, “Well, then it is useless to discuss this point. For a long time Jahangir was a free man, never troubling himself with an iota of thought regarding the politics of the Empire—why Jahangir will be a different man no-day,—come

my dearest,—give me a cup,—let me take rest on thy heavenly bosom."

Nurjahan with characteristic promptitude, poured a quantity of that sweet, intoxicating beverage into a golden cup and put it before the mouth of the king, who did full justice to it ;—Jahangir was again the old Jahangir. He said, "Let me have the guitar, and other best musical instruments, and I shall play and you shall sing to that. God's will be done, why should we bother ourselves about that for nothing, what can we do—how insignificant creatures are we all?"

In a short time sweet songs sung by the sweetest voice on earth in accompaniment of music filled the serene atmosphere of the night ;—to give, or rather to attempt to give a description of that scene is simple foolishness. In the different camps people were mostly awake, and hearing that sweetest music coming from the camp of his Majesty himself, and filling the atmosphere with so solemn a beauty, they looked towards each other's face with wonder and amazement.

CHAPTER XVIII.

MARCH TO DELHI.

Nothing, no information or event of any private nature can be kept a secret under these circumstances. The Fatepur incidents were circulated with all possible haste to every one in the camp, even the meanest camp-attendant was familiar with it. In the morning there was only one talk of conversation among the soldiers, and a number of them sat together in one place in different groups only to discuss over the incidents of Fatepur—the miraculous activities of ghosts in that city. There was none well disposed towards Alam Sha, for they were zealous of his herculean strength, now they all felt inwardly jubilant over the terribly pitiable condition of that monster man, and they began cracking jokes with one other at his expense, though in their heart of hearts they were dismayed and terrified! Those people who were keeping guards in the palace of Marium Begum heard the most terrible noise of lamentation that rent the night air with such horrible fury;—it was revolving in their mind as a permanent terrible, ever present reality, so much so that they got despaired of enjoying a happy sleep ever in future. They were anxious to leave that place, for they apprehended the loss of their life in the hands of ghostly

beings in the event of the Emperor delaying even if not postponing the retreat !

Gradually the day far advanced, but the Emperor, who was rather an early riser did not leave his bed yet then. They all knew that Her Imperial Majesty Queen Nurjahan was in the same camp in the night, and none of them venture to enter the camp to see what was the matter. With the increase of time, their anxiety grew deeper and deeper, for the king was never seen in his bed till so late hours of the day ;—but they had no other alternative but to play the part of eavesdropper,—to hang round the camp to catch a word of their Majesty to remove their doubts that any thing very serious, which they shuddered to think, had occurred. But to their sad disappointment and misfortune no sound, not even that of breath, of inhalation or exhalation greeted their ears and their suspense was simply indescribable.

Gradually the sun passed the meridian, and their anxiety knew no bounds. The leading men in a solemn conclave assembled began to discuss in a rather low voice what they should do under these circumstances ;—and after deliberate consideration, they came to the conclusion that immediate information should be sent to Azof Khan, who it may be remembered was the brother of the queen Nurjahan, and was the most important officer in the camp.

Azof Khan was still in the town, he was still according to the orders of His Majesty keeping watch

at the entrance-gate of Marium Begum's Palace. Azof Khan kept the whole night, and before the day broke, he had ordered for a palanquin, and slept there for a very short time, for he was not accustomed to this sort of sleep, and resumed his duty immediately after! Moreover, the command of His Majesty must be carried out at the risk of life even, and he must stick to the post at all events. He could not move an inch without the permission of the king. But he was expecting at every moment the order of His Majesty to see him;—but hours passed on and on, but no intimation from Jahangir reached him, and his anxiety surpassed all limits. He thought that it was quite impudent for him to wait any longer for the command of His Majesty and was almost on the point of stating, when a number of camp attendants came running to him and said, "Omrao Shaheb, His Imperial Majesty has not yet risen from bed."

Azof Khan was extremely surprised, and in a state of bewilderment, he cried out, "How is that, it is passed mid-day, and still the king is not out of bed?"

"Yes, Khan Shaheb,—the king had not yet sent for any of us," they most promptly and eagerly said;—

"Where is Alam Sha?"

"He is down with fever and is confined to his bed."

"Why none of the generals made any enquiries about it yet?"

"Because Her Imperial Majesty the queen, is in the camp of the king."

Azof Khan's countenance assumed a grave appearance, and in a solemn voice said, "When did Her Majesty go to the camp of the king?"

"We are not positive about it, very probably just after the king had left this palace and retired to privacy."

Azof Khan's face became graver, rather ashy pale;— he did not ask any further word to the emissaries, but turning towards the General in charge he commanded, "Please do not move an inch, replace the present set of sentinels by a fresh one, and I shall communicate to you the command of His Majesty, as early as practicable."

Azof Khan did not wait any further, and immediately directed his steps towards the camp of the king. He was indeed very much agitated and moved, a sense of indescribable terror seized him, for he knew that the king never used to sleep so long. He knew further that the Mogul Empire is passing through a terrible crisis, that deep seated conspiracies and plots were being daily planned, and as a result of which the life of the Emperor and that of the queen were not safe for a day. There was no means of knowing a friend from a foe in the camp. What led the queen to visit the Emperor's camp at such an advanced hour of the night? Was it of her own motion, or the king, after retiring to bed sent for the queen? Azof Khan shuddered to think that the king or queen or both of them were brutally murdered in the bed! Nothing was impossible in that disjoined time!

Shahazada Parbesh had been most mercilessly murdered in his camp, and very probably prince Khurum also met with same fate if the king and the queen had been murdered, if the apprehension of Azof Khan had been verified, the mighty Mogul Empire would crumble to pieces,—none would be able to save it from that inevitable fate. The mighty Empire would be gone,—this mighty edifice would be shattered and torn to pieces like a pack of cards, as if it had been built upon no stronger foundation than that of sands. With those sickening, maddening thoughts Azof Khan ran towards the camp of the king with all possible haste!

Azof Khan reached the camp, and those present stood up and received him with all the attention he deserved. He most eagerly enquired, "Is His Majesty up?"

Just at this time some of the camp attendants came running to the place and informed gasping, "Hoozur, His Majesty has come out, and has sent for you." Azof Khan without exclaiming any word followed the informer with all possible haste.

Jahangir was pacing round the temporarily raised platform built for the purpose. Azof Khan made due obeisance to the king in whose ever-amiable and cheerful countenance, he did not fail to observe clear marks of deep anxiety. Indeed the king's countenance was very grave and serious. Jahangir was a man of Jolly and gay disposition, and even the most serious consideration regarding the affairs of the State could not disturb his ever-geniality of disposition, and affect his

unruffled spirit;—but to-day something very serious must have happened which induced him to put on so sombre a countenance and he was never found so before. He used to smile away the most important affairs of the State fraught with serious consequence, but to-day he was a different man. The events of the last night,—the experiences of the king in the palace of the Marium Begum were not sufficient,—it became patent to the understanding of Azof Khan—to put the king such out of sort. Something more than that must have happened, no one knew how it would turn out.

Azof Khan was almost shaking with fear,—his heart gave way to despondency. He argued in his mind thus, "Why it is so? Is my sister queen Nurjahan no more?" The very thought pressed him heavily down, and he was perspiring and shaking like an aspen leaf, and with the utmost difficulty managed to stand before the king, for he believed that with the life of Nurjahan, their life would also come to an end; and if by the grace of the next successor, the life of his old father and other relatives were spared, their fate would be immensely miserable, no better than the starving beggars in the street! Indeed his position in the Mogul court was due entirely to the undisputed supremacy of Nurjahan, his sister. Azof Khan's countenance turned ashy pale at the thought of his probable future, and he could not utter a single word,—trembling with a sense of ineffable fear, and he continued *Salaming* the Emperor!

For a length of time, Jahangir fixed his searching glance upon the face of Azof Khan with a severity which indicated that strong suspicion was lurking in the bosom of the king. The faithful heart of Azof Khan was stung to the quick at this most unjustifiable suspicion!—But under the peculiar circumstances of the time it was quite natural for the king,—at all events there was nothing to be wondered at—not to confine his suspicion in any particular quarters!

After a good deal of time, Jahangir aksed in a slow but firm and determined voice, "Have you seen anything in the night?"

In a tremulous voice Azof Khan submitted, "Jahapana, we have seen nothing more, both in the upper and lower story, I kept vigilant watch, and the soldiers were true to their duties all night, and my humble self kept watch at the gate throughout the night, but nothing, not even a shadow, no apparition appeared before us!"

"No sound, not even the shadow of any creature?"

"No, nothing, your Majesty."

"Let that drop,—I don't like any more discussion on the subject, let it be ghost or goblin or——"

"Jahapana, this humble servant ventures to put forward a suggestion, and emboldened by the condescending kindness of your Majesty, I say that I can with permission reduce this city to ashes."

"No, I am not willing to efface to blot out from the face of the earth the glory of my late distinguished

father. Azof Khan ! You better start at once for Delhi with the whole force with the least possible delay, you must not tarry a moment here. I don't want any army with me,—my body-guards will be sufficient, I shall go with the corpse of Parbesh, and Khurum—if he is actually dead. I want to be clear of all doubts and perplexities regarding this matter, I shall see if it is the dead body of Khurum. I shall join with you in two days. Go at once, break the camp immediately."

Azof Khan bowed down and in a modest tone submitted, "Your Majesty's order must be carried out to the very letter."

Jahangir again commanded, "Go at once, I want to drive Mahabat Khan to the remotest corner of India start anon."

Azof Khan had to retire without uttering any more words,—his mind was anxious to know about the fate of his sister Nurjahan, but he did not venture to make any enquiries about it. Nurjahan was so long the undisputed monarch of what he surveyed, the dictator of the policy of the Mogul Empire, but to-day she seemed to be nobody, and Jahangir is all in all, Jahangir assumed his kingly functions.

CHAPTER XIX.

LOVE.

Again the deserted city of Fatepur Sikri reverted to its original stillness, the same solitude; the sombre seriousness of which was hundred times heightened by the strong and sudden contrast it made a few hours ago! The Emperor with his vast army and retinue had left the place to utter desolation and loneliness, and as far as the eyes could extend its vision, not a human soul could have been seen! Wherever the Mogul Emperors pitched their camps, in a very short time a busy city arose around it;—innumerable horses, camels and elephants converted the place into a tumultuous town with their peculiar, characteristic sounds! The same wonderful promptitude and thoroughness with which those temporary towns were built were also exhibited in their speedy dissolution and breaking up! This was not the only case with Fatepur Sikri,—there was no fixity, no certainty in the movements of the Mogul Emperors! To-day a camp is pitched here and to-morrow it is removed a hundred miles off! Yesterday Fatepur Sikri was full of the bustles and tumults of a populous town, fitted up to the most up-to-date fashion, but to-day it is a dreary, desolate desert without any

human being. Azof Khan had started with whole Mogul force towards Delhi,—the Emperor with his select and faithfull body-guards moved towards Agra.

It was evening, or rather twilight approaching towards evening. The sun had gone down the western horizon shedding its golden lustre in all direction. It may be remembered that vast expanse of meadows—treeless, shrubless meadows—spread round the deserted city of Fatepur Sikri ; and the beautiful scene thus created excites poetic imagination in the breasts of even the most prosaic of human beings. It was gradually getting darker and darker, and the human figures could be with difficulty discovered. It was at this hour of a previous day, exactly amidst such a soul anthralling scene, that Lulia, that fair fairy of sweet fifteen first met the lord of her life by the side of a well,—since that memorable first interview with Bimal Singh the life of Lulia underwent great transformation !

Lulia had a very faint recollection of her early days. She could not with the utmost stretch of her imagination bring back to her remembrance the day when she first came to that forsaken city, but this much she was sure that the first days of her infancy were not spent amidst such a scene of desolation, that she along with her dear mother, and grandfather came to reside in the ruins of Fatepur-Sikri from a distant country on a remote day long, long ago ! She was then quite a young girl, in a period of life, when the different functions of the senses, were not at all developed, and we

may take it her age then to be six or seven. Since that day Lulia had been living in this deserted town, almost a prisoner, for, before her interview with Bimal Singh there was no other human being save and except Hamida, Mahammad Jan, and her grandfather met her eyes! In the solitude of that forsaken city, she was almost a creature of nature, and her education and up-bringing were mainly through the medium of that universal mother, for no visitor from any quarter ever greeted her eyes!

But like a sprightly creature of nature. like a lovely little fawn, whose mind was uncontaminated by any worldly thought, she moved hither and thither with uncontrolled freedom. In that very loneliness, she used to feel a charm, and never any thought of melancholy disfigured her heavenly countenance. She did not feel any want, for her wants were limited and her grandfather who loved her passionately, with the assistance of Hamida and Mahammad Jan ministered to her comforts in every possible way!—Indeed Hamida loved her as a daughter, and to Mahammad Jan, she was as dear and valuable as his eye-ball.

But with the increase of age a change had come upon the life of Lulia. She was now a grow-up girl on the verge of youth, a sweet little cherub of sixteen, which in Indian climate acquires a development only to be found in a girl of twenty in western climate. Now she began to understand many things which were a sealed book to her in her earlier days. She felt

a sense of uncertainty and vagueness in all these things and quite realized that veil of mysteries had been cast over ! So long she was not endowed with the powers of understanding and many things appeared to her to be shrouded in hazy mysteries,—but now her faculty of thinking greatly developed, and in spite of herself, thoughts of various descriptions crowded into her recollection which cast a pensive expression on her countenance. Sometimes she was seen to be plunged in a thoughtful reverie, and from which an expert physiologist could easily understand she was devoting all her attention to the solution of a puzzle which had been vexing her soul !

She had no doubt in her mind that she was the daughter of a Mahomedan, and that her grandfather, his servant and maid servant were of the Islamic faith ; they all love Mahomedan names ;—but her youthful mind could not explain the riddle that though in their outward movements they appeared to be orthodox followers of the Mahomedan faith, but in their private conduct, they appeared to have Hindu predilections. His dear old grandfather used to worship in a Hindu fashion, and her affectionate *Daima* was more like a Hindu nun—a *Sannyasini* of the austere and rigid type, but with regard to herself, Lulia found she was surrounded by Mahomedan influence,—her food, clothing and education were after Mahomedan model, although in that house no food, prohibited by the principle of Hindu *Swastras*, was ever allowed, It

sometimes happened that Mahammad Jan used to prepare Mahomedan food for her, particularly meat, and his affectionate grandfather used to teach her Arabic and Persian, and she was a voracious reader of several Arabic, Persian and Bengali books ;—of course it is unnecessary to tell our readers that Lulia was already well up in Sanskrit and Bengali. The old Omrao gave her every possible training in the school of Mahomedan etiquette. Her accomplishments were most complete according to the prevailing standard of excellence. She was well trained in fine arts and her singing and music were simply charming. She was endowed with poetic turn of mind, and her composition in the domain of Persian Urdu poetry was of no mean order. But sometimes for minutes together she used to look towards the vacancy being unable to solve what all these were meant for ;—in that lonely solitude who would appreciate her music and poetry ? Indeed her grandfather's zealous endeavour towards this direction was a puzzle and enigma to her simple mind ! She could feel that her education and accomplishments were of the highest order, only worthy of the Begum of the Emperor ! Does her grandfather picture in his imagination such an exalted position for her in future ? Does he want to see her to be the Empress of India ?—A flickering shadow of smile diffused over her serene countenance. That was an impossibility, it was as impossible as the sun would rise from the west !

For the last two or three years, or even from before

Lulia's experiences extended beyond the routine limit of her humdrum stereotyped life ;—she had been observing a new thing. She occasionally found that Hamida was absent for a long time, even sometimes extending over two weeks, such was also the case with Mahammad Jan ! She was quite in the dark as to their strange disappearance and movements, but she never ventured to trouble them with any enquiries, nor they of their own accord made her a confidant. She was a plain sort of girl, and was never trained to this sort of inquisitiveness from her very childhood. But now she was approaching towards womanhood, and these questions began to disturb even her less imaginative soul, although she observed a vow of sacred reticence !

She knew that for the last two years she had been undergoing quite a new course of training, as a result of which she was now an expert musician and the sweet melody of her song enthralled the heart even of a beast. She was cognisant of the fact of her superior knowledge among the ordinary girls of her age,—for under the solacing and affectionate care of her wise and astute grandfather himself, an old man of vast knowledge and intelligence, she is now well versed in both the tenets of Hindu and Mahomedan religion ; but with the increase of age the puzzling question, "What it is all for ?" began to tease her unsophisticated mind ! But her implicit obedience, her unquestioning faith in the wisdom and affection of her grandfather prevented

her from putting any question, or making any enquiries about it,—she unmurmuringly, unquestioningly obeyed the command of that old, wise man, who had no other ambition in his life, than to make Lulia happy !

Before two or three years we are speaking of Lulia had scarcely any occasion to look to the household affairs for every thing regarding the domestic management which was looked into by Hamida, and Lulia mostly passed the happy hours of her early life in company with her grandfather. But in the last two years, on account of the temporary absence of Hamida and Mahammad Jan she was forced to attend to the domestic affairs of that small family,—even she had to cook the food for the use of her grandfather and herself, but she was not at all displeased with the arrangement, rather she felt happy at being able to make herself free from the trammels of routine work, to break the dull tedium of cultivating the fine arts !

But though she felt herself free from the strict discipline of her grandfather, who considering her education to be complete let her have her own way : but now she had again to undergo another unpleasant course of training. Mahommad Jan was a great expert in the art of ventriloquism, and there was none in India, at all comparable to him in that peculiar art which was at one time very popular in the country. In the art of mimicry, he was also unrivalled. He could assume any shape he liked. Now Mahommad Jan formed an idea in his mind, rather he became determined to teach Lulia the

mysteries of that art, which though at first was little liked by the simple-minded girl, but gradually the tactful method of teaching of Mahommad Jan made her a willing and obedient pupil, and she began to feel delight in the culture of that art. In that age she began to feel delight in every thing new, for in that psychological moment, novelty had a charm independent of anything. For in the morning of youth torrents of different thoughts came flooding her young imagination, and her mind felt a vacancy in every thing! In that transition period of her life, she felt quite uncomfortable, and she was herself unconscious of what the heart hankers after, and a dark speck of cloud seemed to have appeared in the mental horizon of that sweet simple girl—and for this reason, music and singing poetry and learning failed to elicit any charm in that bosom—to anything new she devoted herself with a passion and ardour rarely equalled by any other being, and as a matter of consequence, the new art of Mahommad Jan had a fascination for her hungry soul! She mastered that art in the course of a short time, and with the ease and freedom of an expert, she could assume any form she liked. Sometimes she appeared in the garb of an old woman, again she was seen personating a man, and an hour after she was found making the terrible howling of an wolf or tiger! She could imitate the voice of any bird! When alone, out of curiosity and for want of work, she used to beguile the hours in mewling like a cat or barking like a dog! But still her vacant mind felt an insatiable

hankering after something unspeakable, as if a big chasm in her mind was never filled up ! At this correct psychological moment, like a full moon, Bimal Singh appeared in the dark region of her heart, and created a happy and beautiful world. At this period of her life, when girlhood was budding to youth, she poured her whole soul to Bimal Singh with the ardour and impetuosity of a passionate lover. Her whole soul was drawn to him, and the image of Bimal Singh was indelibly stamped and painted upon the broad canvas of her mind. She struggled hard with her own self, but in spite of herself, she utterly lost herself in the greater self of Bimal Singh. She was now entirely oblivious of the whole world, and the image of Bimal Singh filled her whole being !

She did not care to bother herself about the identity, particulars, whereabouts of Bimal Singh ; these thoughts never occurred to her mind. She was happy to see him, to look at him, his great conversational powers charmed her youthful mind, and she could pass day and night listening to every word that fell from those noble lips ! She was no doubt aware that Bimal Singh was also devoted to her. Though not expressed in so many words, Lulia could thoroughly understand that their love was mutual. Lovers can study each one's heart better than any body else !

For sometime Lulia was enjoying the greatest happiness, she could conceive of. Just at this moment—this unfortunate moment—Ajit Singh appeared in the scene.

and disturbed the tranquillity and peace which they were enjoying in the solitude of that deserted city. Her grandfather was very busy. So were Hamida and Mahommad Jan, so much so that few words she could exchange with them ;—but what it was for she could not divine nor think out. To remove her vexing curiosity, she sometimes asked Bimal Singh to be enlightened on the subject, but even from that quarter, she did not receive any satisfactory reply,—only was put off with lame excuses and meaningless words.

Her mental uneasiness surpassed all limits ; she was moving like an wounded stag hither and thither restlessly ! She was obeying the commands of her grandfather, Hamida and Mahommad Jan without any demur or question but she knew not where she was drifting !—Her unalloyed mental happiness, her peace of mind all gone !—The calm, quiet and charming solitude of the place all gone ! Ajit Singh had left the place with his vast army, But Mahommad Toki followed him, and after the return of Toki, or before his thorough evacuation the Emperor himself came to the place with the mighty Mogul force. Heaven alone knows what all these pointed to, and how it would terminate !

Again after so many days peace and happiness returned to this solitary, lonely city—the busy hubbubs of the concourse of people assembled there had died down, and Fatehpur Sikri regained its old peace and happiness, and along with it peace and happiness re-

turned to the soul of Lulia, that simple child of nature. After many days she again took her favourite seat by the side of the well,—and was observing the magnificent scene of the sun going down;—her young heart was full of ineffable pleasure, the intensity of which was enhanced by the deep despair which sat upon her mind a few days before. The morose melancholia which seized upon her was gone, and she was again happy.

When she was thus enjoying the serene beauty of the evening nature, and was fully absorbed in meditating a picture of future happiness to herself, she was startled by the sound of the foot-steps of a human being! She was most agreeably surprised when she found that Bimal Singh, the lord of her life, was coming from behind!—Her beautiful countenance glowed with the radiance of indescribable joy and happiness! But as soon as she rivetted her glance upon the ever cheerful face of Bimal Singh, her mind gave way to a sense of pain! She found that on the supremely beautiful face of Bimal Singh, there was an indelible stamp of grief and anxiety,—that a cloud had spread over the buoyant and gay countenance of Bimal Singh! It was quite a new experience of Lulia and her happy mind suddenly gave way to a sense of sorrow and an involuntary question came out of her lips, in a rather low voice, "What is with you?"

Bimal Singh caught hold of the hand of Lulia with affectionate tenderness and made her sit by his side,—

with a good deal of struggle within, he assumed a cheerful countenance, and then slowly said "Lulia, my darling, perhaps, I shall very soon have to say good-by to you, shall be forced to go elsewhere" Lulia in her wildest dream never thought of such a probability,—she never allowed to disturb her peace of mind with any unpleasant thought. The above expression of Bimal Singh made her forget the whole world, and in a moment she was plunged in the sea of grief; indeed she felt as if she was enveloped in darkness:—in an indistinct voice she ejaculated, "You would leave us?"

Bimal Singh rejoined, "Yes,—Lulia—can't help, would you be sorry then?"

Lulia could not make a reply—tears came trickling down her rosy cheeks and in a choked voice replied, "Yes!"

Bimal Singh dragged her close to his bosom, and imprinted numberless passionate kisses on the coral lips of Lulia who closed her eye-lids, being overcome with a sense which was the outcome of a combination of feelings. "Lulia, my love, I have never said you anything, moreover, there was no occasion, nor opportunity to talk to you about that. I am now going away, at this time of my departure, would you mind telling me a plain thing?"

Lulia cast an anxious, enquiring look upon the face of Bimal Singh, who said, "Lulia, if fortune smiles upon me, if God be willing such a day ever dawns upon my

mental horizon, then—then may I ask—would you consent to be the pratner of my life, to marry me?"

Lulia's face went crimson, a peculiar glow diffused over her whole countenance; she could not utter a word!

CHAPTER XX.

THE FUTURE EMPEROR.

For a time both were absorbed in meditations, utterly devoid of the power of articulation. This was by no means disagreeable to any of them. For with the sanguine disposition, characteristic of the age of Lulia, she had fallen into a train of thought which gradually led her on to a shadowing forth of her own views of happiness, which in many cases turn out to be delightful castle-building upon the golden sands of the future! After a very long pause Bimal Singh in a rather low voice muttered forth, "I am going away from this place, I don't know if I shall ever return."

Lulia seemed to have received a rude, jerking shock, and raising her head in a low plaintive voice said, "Why?"

Bimal Singh in a tone expressive of deep emotion and pathos answered, "You ask me why? That is a long story, I don't like to trouble you with a narration of that, pray, give me this assurance, that if I ever return you would consent to be the partner of my happiness and miseries!"

Lulia with a tremulous voice and with much effort, and in half audible voice said, "Grand pa——"

Lulia, depend upon me, I shall manage that I shall

be responsible for the permission of your grand father, pray, tell me, appease my burning soul, say that you won't object."

"No!" in a firm but tremulous voice she ejaculated.

Bimal Singh bent his face down, drew her towards him, and pressed his warm lips to hers. Lulia trembled like a dove, and her heart fluttered in her bosom like a bird in its cage. She hung with rapture and delight upon every syllable that fell from Bimal Singh's lips—she was lost in a dream as it were, which enveloped her as with a halo—so completely did she abandon herself to the heavenly vision that seemed to have stolen over her senses. Again he bent his face down so that his cheeks reposed against hers: and then he fastened his lips to hers—inhaling all the fragrance of her breath.

Lulia was still swimming in a sea of bliss, and submitted to the arrangement without struggling to extricate herself from his embrace. Bimal wound his arms around her, strained her to his breast, and murmured impassioned words, vows and protestations in her ears and with kisses almost stifled her senses producing suffocation;—her rosy cheeks became crimson with a carnation glow;—she lost all her power of discrimination, and could not judge whether she was doing right or wrong. She merged her soul to that of Bimal Singh and entirely forgot her distinct individuality.

After a length of time, Bimal Singh raised his face—smiling, shining face—glowed with the radiance

of success he said, "I shall live this life for your sake, and for your sake, I shall again return to my native land, and Lulia, my darling, the guiding angel of my life, for your sake also, I shall become the Emperor of India,—and if by the grace of God, the ambition of my life is fulfilled, I shall do something which the world will value as a thing incomparable."

Lulia with eyes wide open and devoured by a sense of wonder and astonishment, cast a longing, vacant look towards the face of Bimal Singh;—she thought "are those passionate expressions, the ravings of a mad man?" Indeed she could not make any meaning out of what Bimal Singh had said.

The young man in a firm, clear and unmistakable voice said, "Lulia, my own Lulia, know it that I am not Bimal Singh, I am not a Rajput, my name is Khurum, I am Shahazada Khurum, I presume you must have heard of my name!"

Lulia's sense of surprise exceeded all limits and an involuntary ejaculation burst forth.

"Khurum. Shahazada Khurum!"

So saying, Lulia stood up or rather attempted to stand up,—with eyes wide open. She cast a longing searching look towards the face of the young man! Prince Khurum now again caught hold of the soft, angelic hands of Lulia—for at the very mention of the fact that the young man was no other than the Shahazada Khurum, she tore herself from his embrace—and made her sit down by his side and with a smiling face

said, "I quite see the reasonableness of your doubts, but you can have them removed by a reference to your grand father. I owe a heavy debt of gratitude to him ; had he not concealed me in the ruins of this city, I would have long ago met with the fate which befell my brother Khusru. I would then have to pass my days in the prison-house of Gwalior, long, long ago. Oh Lulia ! how much I owe to your grand pa ?"

Lulia did not utter a word, she was astounded and like a motionless doll she remained silent ! She was thus arguing in her mind, "He is not a fugitive Rajput Prince, he is the Shahazada himself, Now the mysteries of the past years through which I was passing made clear to me as day light. I now understand what was the object of my old grandpa to give me such a high education, worthy of the companion of the king." Lulia's heart was palpitating and she felt a sense of feeling not unmixed with joy, but a combination of several manifestations of the affective side of her mind, but the weight of which sat like nightmare upon her bosom ! She wanted to place her both hands on her breast as a means to get relief, but the Shahazada pressed that tiny hand with the ardour of a passionate lover !

Prince Khurum again with a smiling countenance said, "Lulia, you must have a deep-rooted feeling of hatred towards all Shahazadas and even scions of the royal family. It is resonable, for you must have heard that they are men of despicable character, given to voluptuousness, drinking and debauchery, but allow me to

say that I am not a Shahazada trained in that school, I am quite a different man.—Do you think I am very very bad, loathsome man ?”

Lulia extricating herself from the grasp of the Shahazada, jumped off a distance and stood up, then in a voice of earnest supplication, she murmured, her words appearing to borrow a liquid intonation from the moistness of the inviting red lips between which they passed, “Jahapana, pardon this humble servant,—this *Bandi*—who has no other greater ambition than to serve you with a devotion unsurpassed,—I could not recognize you, oh ! my Lord, how guilty am I to your noble feet ?”

The Shahazada strained his eyes and with a passionate look of earnestness cast a searching glance upon the celestial face of Lulia, and then in a low voice, but in a firm tone said, “Lulia, the brightest jewel of my soul, you will be my Begum, a real companion of my life, I shall make you the ornament of the palace of my Begums, you will not be a *Bandi*, the whole palace will be obedient to your will.”

Lulia in a tone of excessive modesty answered, “Jahapana, I pray, beseech you, I implore you, not to repeat those words anymore.”

The Shahazada with emphasis and in loud voice ejaculated, “Why not, my love ? I shall repeat my vow before the world, thousand times more, I have loved you, I have given you my life and soul, Lulia,—angel of my life, adorable creature. how devotedly I love you !

I am lost as it were in the contemplation of the boundlessness of my love. My love is as vast as space, and as enduring as the time itself! Why should I not proclaim it to the world?"

So saying, with the above outpourings of his heart, the Shahazada drew her close to his bosom and in a tremulous voice of overwhelming love said, "From to-day you are my *Taj Mahal*, the jewel of my *zenana*, and for your sake I shall become the Emperor!"

No doubt a sort of lascivious langour came over Lulia, but a sense born of natural womanly pride flashed into her mind, and at first she tried to extricate herself from the embrace of the Prince, but that sentiment died down as soon as it was born, and she remained hung to the bosom of her lover;—the Shahazada said, "I am going to relate to you all now, listen!"

Lulia strained her eyes and fixed her steadfast glance upon the [face of Khurum, who continued, "Perhaps, you do not know that my father decided to give the throne to my brother Shahazada Parbesh, and to that arrangement, I had not the least objection, I never entertained the ambition of becoming the Emperor;—but Lulia, listen, I am never unjust. I changed my mind when I found that the *Badsha Bagum* Nurjahan was hatching a secret conspiracy for placing my youngest brother—her son-in-law—on the throne. She is an intriguing woman of uncommon intellect and beauty and my father is more or less a tool in her hands.

When these facts came to light, Mahabat Khan, the great General, and my most intimate friend Bhim Singh, along with other Rajput Generals formed a counter plan to place me on the throne :—and their persistent, earnest request made me consent to the proposal. But the secret oozed out, and it became known to Nurjahan, and she became anxious to remove me anyhow from the sphere of standing in the way of her wishes,——”

Lulia was terrified and in a fearful ejaculation burst out, “Oh ! what a terrible woman she is !”

Shahazada with an air expressive of evident satisfaction smilingly said, “Not in all matters. Perhaps one day you will see her—she is not a constitutionally bad woman, but when the throne of Delhi is the bone of contention, there she is selfishness incarnate, and all softer virtues yield to that !”

Lulia shuddered with fear and in a trembling voice said, “Jahapana, pray, don't take me to Delhi. I very much like to remain here.”

Khurum's countenance brightened with a smile and he said, “Yes, my Lulia, thy will be done,—you are the guiding star, the ministering angel of my life. I must abide by thy will. Had I been in the royal court of my father two days more, I would surely have lost my life. But Providence ordained otherwise. The Begun Nurjahan had an abigail, named Julekha, who was thoroughly acquainted with her plan :—she sent me the information, and with her help, I succeeded

in effecting a safe retreat here-from the palace :—That Julekha sent me to your grandfather, and it was to her suggestion that I put on a woman's garb, and came to this place. Did you notice me then ?”

“I was much terrified.”

“Did I then look most uncouth and awkward ?”

“Oh ! no, I don't mean that.”

“Julekha is a creature of Mahabat Khan, and your grand-father also belongs to the same school of politics. Mahabat Khan is my great hope and strength ;—you have already observed that but for the help of your grand-father, Mahommad Jan and Hamida, I would have been made a captive long ago ;—it was for my capture, that Ajit Singh was sent here, and that Mahommad Toki succeeded him with the same purpose, and that their failure brought the Emperor himself up to this place.

This time Lulia's countenance glowed with a simper and rather jocosely said, “I am sure, none would venture to risk his life here again.”

Shahazada with the same smiling countenance affirmed, “Very probable.”

Lulia most loudly and eagerly demanded, “Why then would you so unkindly leave us here ?”

Khurum said, “Have patience to here me to the end ;—a very terrible misfortune has happened—”

An ejaculation of terror burst forth from Lulia, “Misfortune ! Has any thing unfortunate occurred to your,——”

Shahazada interrupting continued, "Lulia, Lulia, both Mahabat Khan and Bhim Singh were making great preparations with a large army; for my assistance,—they were directing their steps towards this ruined city. Bhim Singh himself came and gave me every information regarding the arrangement;—It was settled that after every necessary preparation has been completed, I was to join them openly. Every thing was complete, but the astute queen Nurjahan forestalled our movements, somehow she got a scent of it, and accordingly she sent Shahazada Parbesh with a large army against Mahabat Khan and Bhim Singh, to frustrate our object; furious battles took place and both parties were defeated!"

"Why? how is that?"

The Prince continued, In a hardly contested battle Mahabat Khan and Bhim Singh came off victorious; Shahazada Parbesh was killed or murdered!"

"Shahazada is dead!"

"Yes, he came by his death, we have not yet been able to ascertain, but the sum total of the whole action was that neither side was victorious;—for my dear, dear friend Bhim Singh, the most valiant Rajput General, was slain in the battle!"

Tears came trickling down his heroic face, and in a most pathetic voice, he ejaculated almost sobbing, "It is my fault, Lulia, had I not been here, concealed as a woman, had I been by the side of my valiant friend at the time of the battle, I am sure, such a brave

general would not have lost his life, and I would not have to mourn the loss of so distinguished a friend, Lulia."

Shahazada Khurum remained silent for a long time; Lulia, that simple-minded girl had not the courage to disturb him. After a while, the Prince re-asserted his self-composure and continued, "By the death of Bhim Singh, the Rajputs got disheartened and dejected, and they retired to their native land;—on the other hand you see, the Emperor himself had started on an expedition, and Mahabat Khan had no other alternative, but to retreat and direct his steps towards Delhi. He has sent me information to the effect that unless I joined with him at the earliest possible moment, at the first opportunity, he would renounce the world and retire to private life and pass his days in the holy city of Mecca, after dismissing his followers and army. In fact, he will not alone fight with the Emperor."

Lulia with much hesitation as becoming a simple, peace-loving girl, said, "Jahapana, let him retire to Mecca, I shan't allow you to go, what's the good of so much blood-shed and confusion and horror?"

Khurum laughed a forced laugh and said, "I don't know what course I would have adopted unless you appeared before me like a vision and apparition. Now I am determined to make you the Empress of India, and for that object in view, I am ready to measure strength with my father."

"Pray, abstain from such a course of action,—I don't

want to be the Empress of India, I am not ambitious of such an exalted position"

"I know your aspiration does not soar so high, as to be the queen of the king of India, and you may take it from me, that I am not very ambitious of the throne of Delhi for its own sake. I would rather consider myself the happiest man on earth, if I could pass my days with you as the partner of my soul in this lonely, solitary place. For, believe me, Lulia, my dearest, the few days that I have just passed with you in this deserted city of Fatepur Sikri, are the happiest period of my life. Lulia, how passionately I love you."

Why then so anxious for war and its concomittant evils?"

"For the sake of life—this sort of life won't do, if I don't fight surely now, I shall be arrested, and the result will be so terrible, that I shudder to think of it for your sake,—there is every probability that I shall lose my life, and even if I can avert that dire result, I shall have to pass my days in a distant country in a dungeon for ever!"

"Why Jahapana?"

Shahazada smiled a forced smile, the simplicity of Lulia made him glad ;—he said, "Lulia, my angel, this is incidental to the high life of the Emperor of Delhi—it is between the two extremes—either I shall be the Emperor or I shall have to lose my life—there is no other alternative but to fight!"

Lulia sighed a deep sigh of mourning and in a rather

grave voice murmured, "I see the poor men are thousand times happier than these kings and Emperors!"

Shahazada in a clear unmistakable voice cried out, Thousand times—there is no doubt about the conclusion you have arrived of my adorable queen Lulia.

CHAPTER XXI.

SANNASHIN—THE NUN.

During the time when the central figures of our historical romance, the hero and heroine of our thrilling historical narrative, were deeply engaged in amorous conversation with each other by the side of the well in the solitude of the ruins of that deserted city seating themselves on the marble stone, two persons with whom our readers are thoroughly familiar were standing at the entrance gate to the city. They were keenly watching, evidently the expected movements of some one else, but as far as the eyes could reach they did not observe any one within the ken of their vision—one of them is Behari Charan and the other our distinguished *Panwali*—betel-seller—Gangia.

Gradually the whole universe was being enveloped in darkness, and nothing at a distance could be easily discerned ;—after standing for some time in that posture, Gangia muttered forth, "We can't see any thing clear !"

Behari Charan rejoined, "Yes, it is dark now, we have already sent Dulali for the purpose ; we hope she will soon bring information !"

Gangia observed, "But she was to come some two days earlier !"

Behari Charan in an assuring tone said. "I quite see that, but considering the troubles through which we have been passing these days, I am glad that it was better for her not to come then !"

"Surely she has come nearer, I mean—"

"Oh yes, certainly, it is not unlikely that she had entered the camp of the Emperor ;—there is nothing impossible for her !"

"We are saved of our anxiety if she arrives just now."

"Yes, I quite admit that."

"Shahazada is leaving this place—it is better that he is going away now, otherwise danger might befall him, his mission here has been fulfilled."

"Oh yes,—they are deeply attached to each other, Shahazada will never be able to forget Lulia in his life."

"All that is well done,—but still there is much time to be lost before the consummation, we so devoutly wish, arrives."

"I quite see that. But I am afraid Khurum won't consent to ascend the throne after taking both Jahangir and Nurjahan prisoners !"

"Then I see our darling Lulia shall have to wait till the death of Jahangir, for before that we can't expect to satisfy our ambition of seeing our Lulia the Empress of India—but Heaven alone knows what fate would await us all !"

"Oh yes, Providence alone knows what is in store for us all !"

"But why we bother ourselves about that? Who are we? Man proposes, God disposes!"

"Why, in my old age, I hope to return to my native land as a big Zemindar,—and you will be my queen!"

"You are a worthless, good-for-nothing man! Go you to hell! Had I been in your place, I would have certainly become the chief officer—the minister of the Emperor, when our Prince Khurum will ascend the throne! And I would have been all in all."

Behari Charan made a peculiar disfiguration of his body, he boxed his own ear, and pulled his own nose, while saying that, "If our mother returns to the native land, I shall accompany her even neglecting the prime ministership of the Mogul Empire. He must be the dullest man on earth, who of his own free will remains to enjoy his influence and position there!"

Gangia in a tone of sarcasm and laughingly said, "What would you do if you are given the throne of Delhi?"

Behari Charan retorted, "I would have poisoned myself then and there!"

"Well, would poison yourself, commit suicide then?"

"Yes, I do say it emphatically! Is it not better to end one's life by his own hand, when there is no knowing who would take it by strangulation, or by means of a sword, or by the application of poison? I do not think self-murder is a sin in these circumstances."

"Do you think that the Emperor is the most unfortunate man on earth?"

"You can see that !"

"I am thinking of my own betel shop !"

Behari Charan made faces and eagerly interrupting observed, "I don't care a fig for your shop, let it go to the dogs,—to tell you the truth, when I found that, those rogues, my brothers-in-law are cutting jokes with you at the time of selling your articles to them, I lose my temper and very much like to kill them by strangulation or by stabbing !"

So saying Behari Charan made terrible sounds by clenching his teeth, to which Gangia replied by laughing and said, "So zealous at this old age ?"

Behari Charan ejaculated with anger. "You say, jealousy ;—those stupid brothers-in-law must be taught a good lesson !"

"Be careful, if some body overhears, you will lose your life !"

"Oh ! I don't mind, I feel very strongly on the point."

"When would Shahazada leave this place ?"

"To-night positively."

"What about marriage then ?"

"To-night they will go through the ceremony of marriage !"

"You say this,—but I don't see the preparation or arrangement for this."

"Oh yes, the old man has gone out for making the necessary preparation of marriage ;—he has not given us any idea as to the time, he would return."

"Do the bridegroom and the bride know any thing about their marriage?"

"No, they don't" he would tell them on his return, when both sides are willing and ready, who on earth can prevent the combination?"

"Well, keep your eye fully strained, concentrate all your attention, and see if any body is coming;—it seems some one is coming this direction!"

"Yes,—they are coming, let us move on and see."

They observed that at a distance some people were coming towards the city under the cover of darkness, but they could not distinguish or recognize who they were. So, in order to see who they were both of them advanced towards the direction they came from."

While they were going Gangia demanded, "What about my betel shop?"

"I have received information, every thing is going on well."

"Do people make enquiries about me?"

"Oh yes, they do, always, every now and then!"

Behari Charan again made terrible sound, by the clenching of his teeth! Gangia smilingly said, "People know of my occasional visits to my maternal aunt's house, and this time they also interpreted my absence in that way."

"How can they know that you have two appearances that you assume two shapes? I alone do know it."

"What do you mean?"

"Oh! you are ninny, I see I am tired of it!"

"Accursed creature, I shall put fire in thy face !"

"You are childless, so you are the proper person to put fire into the mouth of your wife, as a necessary act of religious merit,"

"You stupid monkey !"

"Oh ! I value this new appellation, this new title,—then I ought to entertain thee with my natural sweet voice."

So saying Behari Charan began to imitate the sounds of monkeys in a wonderful manner. In the art of mimicry, he was unsurpassed and the whole atmosphere resounded with his shrill voice.

"Oh save me, save me," so saying Gangia bounded off and stood at a distance. The successful imitation of Behari Charan left no doubt in the mind of the people who had the misfortune to hear him that the sounds were made by any other creatures, than real monkeys,—a number of them combined together ;—it appeared that quite a number of monkeys had been beaten down, and making shrill sounds in a terrible manner for fear of life !

In response to the terrible noise made by the mimic monkeys, there was heard at a distance the same sound, upon which Behari Charan stopped, and said to Hamida, "Look here, how Dulali, my most favourite pupil, is making proper replies to me !"

Gangia most eagerly cried out, "Then our *Ranima* is coming, let me go home and make necessary arrangement."

Behari Charan objecting, "The order is otherwise, you must remain here, and abide by her command, when she arrives."

Gangia observed, "It is dark now, let us bring a light from home."

Behari Charan impatiently ejaculated, "What nonsense you say? Do you think that we are the only spies in the world, and none else can serve as such? Who knows that Nurjahan has got spies here? She is a shrewd woman of uncommon intellect. I am really afraid of that brother-in-law of mine, I mean Gaharjan. I don't know if he is a male or a female—I can't believe that ambitious, infernal wretch!"

Gangia burst into a fit of laughter and said, "You have sent him to Agra, most capitally done;—perhaps, he has never been taught such a lesson in his life before."

Behari Charan vehemently objecting, "You may rest assured that all this is the work of that brother-in-law of mine!"

"Do you think he has come back to this place after his recent experiences?"

"Oh yes, that shameless barefaced ruffian is capable of doing any thing!"

Just at this time, the persons who were coming to that direction, arrived at that place, and one of them asked from the darkness, "Who are you?"

Behari Charan responded, "Our gracious mother,—we are your children."

"Whom do I hear, Behari Charan?"

"Yes, mother, and Gangia too."

Three persons then appeared in the scene. One of them is a *Sannashini* with long tied up bundle of hair,—in the right hand was a trident, a terrible weapon always used by this class of religious mendicants, and in this case it was ornamented with vermilion, and in the left hand there was a vessel, a necessary appendage to this life. The dishevelled tied up long curls of hair flowed down to her waist,—she was clad in coloured cloth used by the monks, and the whole forehead was ornamentally rubbed with sweet scented sandal; from her neck hung a long garland of *Rudrakshya*! Indeed, it was an imposing, awe-inspiring figure commanding reverence and love from any one who has the occasion to look at her!

The little figure of Dulali was following that of the *Sannashini*. She had a small bag containing sundry articles on her head, and following her was another, who, judging him from his appearance seemed to be a Brahmin of learning and education!

In a mild, low voice, as if pouring sweet ambrosia to the listeners, the *Sannashini* said, "Behari Charan, I am afraid you got extremely anxious for our delay!"

Behari Charan submitted, "Mother, we were passing through such troublous times these days, that we had absolutely no time to think over that and consequently we were free from anxiety or the gravest magnitude."

"Why? The Emperor or rather I mean Nurjahan troubled you much, I presume!"

"Yes, mother, to some extent it is so, we were put to much trouble and inconvenience."

"What then? Please relate."

"They then out of kindness left the place and that's all."

The *Sannashini's* radiant face beamed with a smile, and asked, "What did they do, please narrate."

"They could not rest satisfied by sending Ajit Singh and Mahommad Toki to capture us, that the Emperor with that shrewd woman personally came to this place!"

The *Sannashini* with a look of wonder eagerly ejaculated, "What then?"

"Then they had some painful experiences of our special knowledge, and by your grace, mother, we are sure, they won't taste the sweetness of this place."

She smiled, and it exhibited her mental elation and asked, "I know that, but I hope they have not got any clue as to his movements!"

"No, not a whit."

"I hope Shahazada is all right."

"Yes, mother, both of them."

Then I see we have come off victorious and they have been, I mean Nurjahan in particular, has been defeated at every step. To-day, the mission of my life is going to be fulfilled—the one ruling passion of my life is to be gratified! Behari Charan, I look upon you as my son, are you not satisfied?

Behari Charan with enthusiasm, but in a low under-

tone answered, "Mother, should I tell you that our happiness is indissolubly bound up with that of yours; if you are happy, we are all happy :—we all love Lulia, more than our own life, what greater happiness, we can conceive of if we see our Lulia to be the Empress of India,—this is the *Summum bonum* of our life."

"How is my Lulia doing?"

"She is all right, in excellent health, mother."

"Then let us go—we should not tarry here any longer, you know, Behari Charan, that we are most safe here in this deserted city, it is the safest place for us all!"

Then they all started together for their habitation in the forsaken city of Fatepur Sikri.

CHAPTER XXII.

HOPE OF KHURUM.

A student of history is presumed to be familiar with the details of the life of the Prince Khurum. He was roaming in the forests and jungles, from one place to another, in the hill and dale, like a wounded animal, fully concealing his identity. He lost all his hopes,—the small spark of hope that was lurking in his bosom was long extinguished,—his most intimate friend, upon whose bravery and heroism he mainly rested was most severely wounded in a battle with Prince Parbesh, so much so that ultimately it resulted in his death ! All his Rajput followers, in the absence of their general from whom they drew their inspiration in the hours of depression left the battle-field and retired to Marwar, especially want of any information about Shahazada Khurum told heavily on their minds, and Mahabat Khan even with the help of his persuasive eloquent tongue could not succeed in keeping them under control and fighting mood, even after the unexpected and mysterious death of the Prince Parbesh ! Moreover, Gaja Singh of Marwar made a vehement attack upon him with a large army. Both the Princes of Marwar and Amber were not well disposed towards him. Mahabat Khan received the information that

Mahammad Toki was coming upon him with a large army, followed by that intrepid queen Nurjahan with the whole strength of the mighty Mogul Empire! The fact is well-known to every reader of history that Nurjahan entertained in that fair bosom rancourous venom of the severest description against Mahabat Khan and was ready to move heaven and earth to crush him. She could never forget the indignity and humiliation which she experienced in the battle-field of Lahore, when both the queen and the Emperor Jahangir were made prisoners by Mahabat, who knew full well that the queen would not be slow to wreak her vengeance upon him at the first occurrence of an opportunity. But Mahabat was a very brave general, not to be dismayed or swayed away from his resolute purpose by any ordinary hinderance. He was rather ready to confront the vast legions of the Emperor regardless of the consequences! But the Prince for whom he was ever to lay down his life could not be induced to join him,—repeated, earnest appeals from him could not move Prince Khurum from the ruins of Fatepur Sikri! He was over head and ears in love with Lulia—that simple made of nature! Like Antony of old, he might be described to have said, “Let Rome be melted away with the silver.” Love of Lulia made him blind to every thing, and the throne of Delhi was gradually slipping off his hand so to say. The idea of the ambitious life of the Emperor of Delhi sometimes goaded him, but it died down as soon as it was born

within him, by the appearance of the heavenly face of Lulia in his mental vision, and he put it off till the patience and love of Mahabat got fully tired. and who left the battle-field in utter disgust, and started for Mecca to holy pilgrimage in the direction of Surat leaving instructions to his soldiers to retire to their native homes !

The meeting of Lulia with the Prince Khurum, entirely changed the history of India. The Prince was virtually a slave to Lulia's wishes and desires, had she not been there, the Prince would have certainly gone elsewhere with the appearance of Ajit Singh in that desert of Fatepur Sikri. But he was enamoured of the charms of that simple girl and consequently, he failed to join with either Mahabat Khan or Bhim Singh. But God had ordained otherwise and the Emperor Jahangir was saved the fate of being made a prisoner as was the lot of Prince Khurum in his later days ! Had he been a little more active, the domineering queen would have been made a captive, with her Imperial Consort. But the love of Lulia, the strong bond of affection could not have been severed, and in spite of his utmost efforts, he could not move an inch from the ruins of Fatepur Sikri. All the articles of luxuries and pleasures were at his command, but the pure, unalloyed happiness which he experienced from the enjoyment of the company of Lulia was simply indescribable. Indeed, he was enjoying happiness to which nothing on earth, even the possession of the

throne of Delhi could not stand any comparison;—and slowly the ambitious idea of becoming the Emperor of India was vanishing from his mind! Sometimes in the sequestered place of Fatepur, he gave himself up to the meditation of the future possibilities of his life. He compared in his mind the two aspects of life which were possibly open to him, viz.—the homely, peaceful life of a villager, enjoying the blessed happiness of a loyally devoted and faithful wife, with the happiness and pleasures arising out of the magnificent pomp and pleasures incidental to the life of the Emperor of Delhi, a life full of anxieties and troubles and even of insecurities, in which he must be prepared for death at time any day, but the life with heavenly a creature as Lulia as a wife, even in a jungle, is more desirable, where pure happiness could be enjoyed. The repeated requests of Bhim Singh to run away from the desert of Fatepur Sikri were of no effect upon his mind, he could not for a moment bear the idea of separation from Lulia, and in spite of his wishes, he could not join with Bhim Singh. Every day he formed a plan, made a resolution of leaving the ruins of Fatepur and to join with his friends who were always ready to sacrifice their life for him, but the idea vanished away with it so to say! Days passed into months, months rolled into years, but the Prince was ever a slave to Lulia! This womanly conduct of the Prince utterly disgusted Bhim Singh, and regardless of the consequences of passing through an enemy's camp, he came to Fatepur

Sikri at the risk of his life, and interviewed the Prince, from whom Bhim Singh succeeded in extracting a promise of leaving the abode of his worship, the sacred place of Fatepur Sikri in a short time. But as was natural, he failed in it. Moreover, it was at a time when it was extremely difficult for him to leave that place with safety, without being detected by the enemies. To try a chance was very risky, for Mahammad Toki with a large army at this time had almost stationed himself in the ruins of Fatepur Sikri, and before he had left that place, the Emperor Jahangir himself was there at the head of the whole Mogul force! But in spite of these difficulties, with the utmost efforts and sincere assistance of those who were in charge of protecting his life, the Prince could have effected a safe retreat from the ruins of Fatepur Sikri, but he himself was not actively willing to leave the place, and moreover, the persons to whose care and custody his life was, did not like to see him away from them. For the above reasons, the Prince Khurum remained at Fatepur Sikri, and repeated requests and entreaties of Mahabat Khan could not drag him down the place!

But alas! when the Prince left Fatepur Sikri, all his hopes for the throne of Delhi had vanished away,—there was not an iota of chance on which he could build a hope! Mahabat Khan had already started for Mecca, and the Maharana of Mewar, the sagacious Karna Singh was most reluctant to enter into open hostilities with the Emperor Jahangir. The only way open to the

Prince was Udaypur. If he be so willing, he could, get succour and help and a safe asylum in that country, where the hospitality of Rajputs would protect him from any possible dangers that might assail him. They would receive him with all the pomp and ceremony due to royalty and even if the Emperor Jahangir made an effort to capture him, and make a prisoner, the whole population of Rajputana would risk their lives to protect a single hair of his head ! For the protection of the life of one seeking their help, the entire Rajputana Mewar, Marwar, Udaypur, would not hesitate to stand shoulder to shoulder to join in that holy task !

Prince Khurum got a confidential letter from the Maharana of Udaypur through a trustworthy spy ; he had no other alternative, but to seek the help of that noble-minded Rajput—to live under his protection. Now he was a helpless man, without any military power to back him, as our readers might remember that both Mahapat Khan and Bhim Singh left the battle-field after being utterly disgusted with his womanly conduct and utter stupidity of the idea of trying his strength with the Emperor was now brought fully home to his mind, and thoroughly realized the gravity of the situation and thought of running away from the place at once. He knew full well the fate which would meet him in the event of his being made a prisoner by the king Jahangir, who did not show any mercy to Shahazada Khurum;—but even if his father might take a lenient view of his conduct and be magnanimous enough to for-

give him, it was as sure as the sun rises in the East, that Nurjahan, that domineering, selfwilled. queen would not move an inch from her purpose, and inflict on him a Punishment which, if might not result in his death, but sure to put him out of the sphere of activity by making him a prisoner for life. Under the above circumstances, there was only one prudent course left to him, to throw himself under the protection of the Maharana.

The other historical circumstances were not at all unknown to him. He knew that Emperor himself had marched towards Delhi for the utter destruction of Mahabat Khan and his army. News reached him to the effect that the king was bent upon ruining Mahabat as he believed that Mahabat had a hand, rather he was privy to the conspiracy for the murder of his favourite son Parbesh, and that a royal proclamation had been issued to the effect that whoever would be able to bring prince Khurum to the presence of the Emperor either living or dead, must be presented with a reward of ten thousand Asrafies. The king had further ordered that in the event of a necessity arising, he would not hesitate to level the ruined city of Fatepur Sikri to the ground. For the above reasons it was patent to the meanest understanding, not to speak of such an enlightened prince as Khurum that mercy from the Emperor could only be very dearly bought, and that a safe and hasty retreat from the place was the only course left open to him !

It was no good lamenting the past. He quite felt that an act of indiscretion and weakness at the proper psychological moment of life had lost him the throne of Delhi;—a timely meeting with Bhim Singh or Mahabat Khan would have saved the situation, and very probably gained him the throne of Delhi. However, he fully understood that it was an act of folly, or the inscrutable laws of fate or his ardent, passionate love for Lulia, whatever it might be, the fact was indisputable that he lost the throne of Delhi for ever, and no amount of repentance would be of any avail. He fully realized the insecurity of life at Delhi and the course of life, he decided upon, was the best for him. In fact, he was not at all sorry for the loss of property of gaining the throne of Delhi; in fact, the love of Lulia utterly engrossed his whole attention, and he was ready to lose the whole world in favour of gaining a lovely glance from that sweet girl Lulia!

There was another consideration behind it. His life at Fatepur Sikri was quite safe. He had several occasions to notice the extraordinary intelligence, promptitude and tact of those people, which they always exhibited to protect his life. The utmost skill with which he was concealed in that deserted city had baffled the utmost efforts of all the greatest Mogul generals, even of the Emperor himself with the whole strength of the Mogul army at his back to discover him in that place. They had to leave that place instead smitten, by a sense of ineffable fear due to supernatural, ghostly

activity ! So his life, he regarded there as most safe and secure. He knew that outside Fatepur Sikri, his life was full of dangers and insecurity, and heaven alone knew what fate awaited him in the event of that eventuality and as a prudent man, he did not leave that place,

The Prince could thoroughly recognize Julekha, the abigail of the queen Nurjahan. But he was not at all acquainted with the past history of her life, none at Agra was familiar with it, a veil of mystery was cast over the details of that wonderful life ; but the fact was well known to many that she was the right hand of that imperious queen ;—a most trustworthy servant. Julekha kept the Prince fully informed of all the movements planned against him in the court of Agra, which was initiated and dictated to by that all powerful queen, and accordingly he could take steps to provide against those plots. Finding that the life of the Prince was not at all secure in the court of Agra, he in obedience to the kind advice of Julekha which was confidentially and carefully communicated to him fled to Fatepur Sikri in the garb of a woman from the fort of Agra. Here in this lonely deserted city, he was very happy,—not only that he obtained as a prize from heaven Lulia, the guiding star of his life, but all the attending circumstances were helpful to the growth of a happy and undisturbed life. Salabat Khan, Mahammad Jan, Hamida, all of them were ready to sacrifice their life to save a single hair of his head, and they kept him almost in a

right royal style. It was due to their sagacious ingenuity that Ajit Singh, Mahammad Toki and even the Emperor with his vast army failed to discover him there and to cause to him any loss in any way, even the utmost efforts of Nurjahan in this direction was frustrated; under the above circumstances he was most reluctant to leave that place,—to move an inch from that sacred shrine of his love. But he had been forced to move elsewhere. The strict order of the king was to reduce to dust the whole city of Fatepur Sikri with the least possible delay, so his residence in that place any longer was most unsafe and unwise, But he was now going to be driven away from his last resting place to the mercies of the world, a homeless vagabond, from whom all hope of ascending the royal throne had gone; he had been eternally banished so to say, and heaven alone knew what terrible fate awaited him. But he was determined upon one point, viz. to make Lulia the companion of his life for eternity, regardless of the consequences that it might bring. So he was unwilling to leave that place without going through the ceremony of marriage with Lulia to which the old Salabat gave his hearty consent, and as such the ceremony was to have been performed that day. To-morrow he was going to be banished for ever, but hope, the last infirmity of human mind never left him, and building a pyramid upon a point on the reverse, he made himself ready to go through the ceremony of marriage.

CHAPTER XXIII.

MARRIAGE ARRANGEMENT.

We are now giving a brief description of the palace of Marium Begum. The time we are speaking of was full of uncertainties and troubles, the life and properties of the people were most unsafe, and the modern institutions for the suppression of crime and for the administration of justice were not in existence. In those troublous times, all the big people in affluent circumstances, used to construct their houses in a manner so as to ensure the safety of the riches contained therein. Each big mansion contained many private windows and doors to shut out from the vision of the public the private life of the inmates therein. All the palaces of the Mogul Emperors, particularly the chambers in the inner apartments had within them innumerable secret rooms, secret windows and doors and secret means of ingress in and egress out of them. Almost all the magnificent mansion in Delhi and Agra, where the Mogul Emperors had occasion to pay visits, were constructed and fitted up to that purpose, and all the mechanism and contrivances were applied to suit the object. The secrecy and mysteries velling over the construction of these houses were sometimes only known to their masters, and in Fatepur Sikri, all the

magnificent palaces were built with a special care. There is a speciality attached to the city of Fatepur Sikri, for it was a new city built under the fostering guidance and care of the great Akbar, to whom the mysteries of construction were alone known, save and except the eminent masons who so skilfully built it ;— of all the buildings in Fatepur Sikri, Marium Begum's palace received the most anxious and careful attention of that great monarch, who did not divulge the secret to any body else in the world, for at the time of his death Akbar was not in that city, and it did not occur to him, or rather the necessity of it was not apparent to him to explain the secrets to any one else.

The people entirely forgot the name of the eminent sculptor whose wonderful skill in devising the mechanism and contrivance of the palace of Marium Begum, was purchased by the great king at a very heavy expense. In course of time, by the strange irony of fate that distinguished architect manson was reduced to extreme poverty ! His extraordinary skill was on a par with his notorious extravagant prodigality, and he was saved from actual starvation by the generosity of Salabat Khan, and as a recompense for this great act of kindness, he divulged the secret of the Fatepur mysteries to the old Omrao, at the time of his death, and till then Salabat was the only man initiated to this mystery. This was a providential arrangement, for their first meeting was due to pure accident.

The choice of Salabat of this lonely place for his

residence had a meaning and object underlying it, for he found in it the means of satisfying the most cherished ambition of his life, the ruling idea that was goading him through and through;—for the solitary buildings of the deserted city were exactly suited to the scheme which he formulated in his mind. He submitted a prayer to His Majesty, the Emperor Jahangir, for being permitted to pass the remaining days of his life in solitude of Fatepur Sikri. The Emperor, who was a large-hearted man, although he did not know much about Salabat beyond the fact that he was an old man of contemplative turn of mind, devoted to the culture of religion, hailing from Bengal, the king most readily and willingly sanctioned the prayer:—not only that the Emperor was graciously pleased to grant him a monthly allowance for his livelihood, and since then Salabat had been living in Fatepur Sikri with his granddaughter Lulia, and Mehammad Jan and Hamida, his servant and maid servant. Except his very small family group, none else in the world knew the existence of Lulia, not to speak of her being in company with Salabat Khan, who kept it a secret with the earnestness of a religious vow. For there was no doubt about the fact that as soon as Lulia's residence in Fatepur Sikri would be known to the Emperor, or any of the Shaha-zadas or a Mansabdar or even to an Omrao, the little cherubim would be snatched away from the bosom of her grand-father, which no earthly power would be able to prevent. For the Emperor would have gone to

the length of purchasing such a nonpariel of beauty by any price conceivable ! For the above reason Salabat Khan selected this lonely place for his residence.

Lulia was not a confined prisoner there. Mahammad Jan and Hamida tried their best to give her every possible comfort, and it was their object to see that this innocent girl might not feel the loneliness and pangs incidental to a banished life, and so she was sometimes taken to distant palaces of Agra, the then metropolis of the Empire. To the people of Agra she was not fully unfamiliar, but she did not appear before them in her own natural simplicity as a girl, but a grown up woman.

So for a long time, the old Omrao was passing his days in the solitude of Fatepur Sikri, undisturbed by any occurrence. Before the advent of Prince Khurum to this deserted city, there was none else, except the old Maulavi, who was very well disposed towards the Omrao. Indeed, the Maulavi was entirely subservient to the will of Salabat Khan. Our readers who have followed us all along must have observed that the Maulavi was none else than our familiar Mahammad Jan, and he it was who received the monthly allowance from the court of Jahangir on behalf of Salabat under the assumed title and garb of the Maulavi, from the Emperor down to the meanest person of Agra knew him to be the Maulavi, and no new comer visited the place since the recent disturbances.

Indeed, Salabat Khan was passing his days in

undisturbed happiness in the ruins of Fatepur Sikri till the arrival of Prince Khurum in that lonely locality. But though it was not entirely to his initiative, it was just after his liking, for he was confident that Shahazada Khurum would once ascend the throne of Delhi. Even the recent reverses which fell to the lot of the Prince and his party did not damp his spirit ;—he did not lose heart, for he still entertained the hope that to-day, to-morrow or at a distant date. Prince Khurum was destined to be the Emperor of India, and as a matter of consequence, his heart leaped with joy that the Prince was enamoured of the beauties and virtues of his grand-daughter ;—it was quite natural for him to be so gratified at the thought, for a grand-father is ever devoted to the welfare of his grand-daughter, the darling of his life !—When the proposal of marriage emanated from the Shahazada himself, the old man with great alacrity consented to it ;—and to-day Lulia, the angle of his soul, is to be married to the Shahazada !

The ceremony was to be performed in the historic palace of Marium Begum ! We have seen how artistically and skilfully this magnificent palace was built, we have seen how even the Emperor Jahangir himself was made a fool there. But it is a matter of great misfortune that with the death of Salabat the wonderful mysteries attached to the construction of this house, remained unsolved to the world. Now the visitors, or even the local people, none of them know any thing of this wonderful mechanism !

There was a beautiful conically shaped structure on the summit of this place, and at the first sight it appeared to be a part and parcel of the ceiling of this structure, rather a solid mass without any accommodation within. But in fact it was a beautifully painted, richly furnished chamber, spacious enough to accommodate many people, with many secret private doors and windows, quite concealed from public gaze. There was another contrivance by which the bedstead in the second floor with all its apparatus, even the person upon it could have been easily carried over to this beautifully embellished chamber. There was not in existence such a private pleasure-hall fitted up to all the luxuries of the age. The walls of this chamber had hung upon them several pictures most beautifully painted by eminent men, but most of them exhibited a rather voluptuous taste! Whenever a beautiful lady was sleeping in the bedstead of the chamber in the first storey, she could have been easily brought to this excellently furnished secret hall without her knowledge! Heaven alone knows how many paragons of female beauties have tasted the pleasures of ineffable love in this wonderful secret chamber of Marium Begum's palace!

From this conically shaped pleasure-hall on the summit of the palace, there ran a small way through the walls much down to the earth beneath it! None could even suspect that there existed a passage of that description, but this small passage had a connection with a comparatively larger way which ran a great

distance beneath the earth. By the side of this larger passage, there stood the residence of Salabat Khan, to which there was free access. If any one was so disposed to run away from the house of Salabat, concealing his identity, he could have easily done so, and none on earth except those in the selected circle could have any trace of him ; like an apparition he seemed to have been dissolved in thin air—and Lulia one day effected her escape in that way !

There was another contrivance more startling and of more amazing description. The passage we have described above ran under ground by the side of the fort and beneath the hilly tracts to a long distance in a deep forest to a temple situated within. It was evidently a temple of *Siva* and the extremity of the above described passage met the *Siva Linga* in the temple, which by skilful management could have been easily removed and a traveller by the secret passage could have easily got out of the city, in spite of the fact that vast legions of army had surrounded the city ;—for the above season, the best efforts of the Emperor and his vast army were defeated in capturing or arresting Prince Khurum or that jolly little girl Lulia, for when pressed by necessity they used to conceal themselves either in the secret pleasure-hall or in the temple of the *Siva*, or in the thick of the forest !

We have seen before how Ajit Singh, and the Emperor were carried above in the conically shaped, so splendidly furnished pleasure-hall of the great Akbar.

To-day the marriage of Lulia is going to be celebrated in that chamber !

The arrangement for the marriage had a novelty in it, which struck wonder in the heart of the Shahazada, who stood aghast at unexpected strangeness of the scene. There was one very strong reason for the choice of this room as the fitting place for the performance of the marriage, for the Emperor's soldiers, his spies were moving in all directions, and this secret place would ensure the safe performance of the ceremony baffling the utmost detective scrutiny of the most intelligent spy. Our readers must have observed the manifold advantages which this amazingly beautiful chamber presented.

The Prince was by nature a beautiful young man of consummate, conspicuous personality. He needed no adventitious aid to enhance the natural beauty of his person. For beautiful he indeed was with that cast of countenance for which ancient Rajput heroes were famous. His complexion was singularly fair, clear and stainless ; his nose was small and perfectly straight,—his lips were red and full, and his teeth brilliantly white and faultlessly uneven. His neck was long and gracefully turned—his ears remarkably small and delicate. His eyes were large, dark and beaming with intelligence ; but all the different feature put together, there was an awe-inspiring charm in that grand figure and majestic department. To-day the Prince had been dressed in a becoming manner ;—

he put on a golden crown richly ornamented with diamonds and pearls, and the costume with which he clad his person was of the most gorgeous and luxurious description, the dazzling lustre emitting from it struck the imagination of even Salabat and particularly of Lulia !

Overcome by a sense of bewilderment, the Shaha-zada remained standing in that beautifully decorated chamber. Indeed, he could not even in his wildest dream expect such arrangement for his marriage in that place of loneliness,—every preparation was complete for the performance of a Hindoo marriage,—all the necessary ingredients of a Hindu marriage were there. A Hindu priest was there dressed in white silk cloth seated on a carpet on the marble floor, and the imposing figure of Salabat Khan in a standing posture, clad in silk cloth was there,—a piece of silk cloth was hanging round his neck ; he appeared every inch a Hindu. At a small distance from the central place were seen standing both Mahammad Jan and Hamida in Hindu costume, anxiously expecting the orders of their master ! But strangely enough, Lulia, that celestial little angel, was not there !

The Prince was puzzled and bewildered ! He was moving his anxious, searching, enquiring look upon the face of Salabat Khan, the priest and the servant and maid servant in quick succession. A sense of vague uncertainty filled his mind. He was muttering within himself, "What is all this ? Are they cutting jokes with me ?"

When he was discussing in his mind the peculiar situation thus presented before him, two female figures of super-human charm of entirely different description entered this hall of ceremony! One of them was a *Sannashini* with long curling tied up hair flowing in *dishevelli* over her back, and the other is our ever familiar cherubim of incomparable beauty—the future Empress of India!

The heart of Shahazada leaped with joy at the sight of Lulia, the adorable creature, the object of his worship, and he most eagerly and enthusiastically asked, "What's all that, Lulia?" He then cast his eyes towards the face of the *Sannashini*, and in a tone of amazing wonder cried out, "What's that! Who is she?—Julekha—the abigail—you—in this—posture—here! I have heard that you——"

Lulia suddenly interrupted and in a musically sweet undertone said, "Oh Lord of my life;—she is my mother!"

The Prince seemed to have lost his consciousness, wandering in a fairy land—indeed, his face assumed a countenance expressive of indescribable surprise, in a half-audible voice he muttered, "Ju—le—kha, mother—of—Lulia!"

CHAPTER XXIV.

JULEKHA'S ACCOUNT.

Julekha ! how beautiful, how ennobling does she look in that *Sannashini* dress ! She moved close to Shahazada and in a smiling countenance said, "Shahazada, permit me to disturb you ; there is every reason for you to get bewildered at the situation thus presented, for, you noble Prince, you are not at all acquainted with stories of misfortunes and sorrows of this humble woman ;—for over two decades I have been serving as a Bandi——"

Julekha's voice choked with emotion and for a time she remained silent, but in a trice she regained her self-possession and continued with a heavenly smile playing on her face, "Shahazada, still there is enough time, if you feel any scruple of conscience in taking a Bandi's daughter as the partner of your life in all solemnity of religious earnestness, you can retire, pray, tell me plainly——"

The Prince interrupting and with excitement ejaculated, "The daughter of a Bandi ! You are a queen amongst your sex ; had Lulia been the daughter of an assassin, I would have been proned to make her a companion of my life,—she will be the ornament, the

jewel of the queens in the Begum Mahal, and I have designated her *Taj-Mahal*, i.e. the crown of the Palace of the Begums."

The countenance of Julekha brightened with a radiant smile and she most feelingly said, "Pray, take from me the appellation I give you ;—from to-day you will cease to be known as Prince Khurum, but the Emperor *Shajehan*, viz. *Sha* by which I mean the Emperor and *Jehan*, the world, allow me to call you the Emperor of the world."

The Prince smiled a forced smile and returned, "I have given up that hope, you holy mother, but I am not sorry, for except that one point that it deprives me of the happiness of seeing my Lulia the Empress of India !"

Julekha in a very grave voice rejoined, "Prince, we still entertain that hope—why I should say 'hope', for I am confident that sooner or later at some future date you are destined to be the Emperor of India ?"

The Prince with great enthusiasm ejaculated, "Let that be done by the grace of God, I shall then leave to posterity a monument dedicated to the memories of my *Taj-Mahal*, which I am sure the world will value as incomparable. Let that matter drop now, for god be willing and fortune be smiling, we shall have ample time for its discussion. I see Lulia is the daughter of a Hindu, and my own mother was also the daughter of a Hindu, I promise by all the solemnity of religion that from to-day Lulia is my wife—let the ceremony be

soon performed. Our time is short, our life is full of danger."

Julekha in a soft tone of re-assurance said, "So long you are here with us, you are perfectly safe, Prince, for we shall try to save you even at the lost of our life—"

The Prince interrupting, in a tone of deep gratitude, "I know that, noble mother of the noblest of girls, but for your help, heaven alone knows, where I would have been by this time."

Julekha added, "Noble Prince. we very much like that before you take Lulia as your wife, you should know the particulars of her parentage and character ;—we do not wish that you should marry a girl of whom you know nothing !"

The Shahazada in a clear tone of unmistakable firmness said, "I am not at all anxious to bother myself with the family history of my Lulia or yourself, or any body else,—but if you want you may relate."

"Pray, sit down then, as I may have to trouble you with a pretty long story."

The Prince sat down and others followed him, Julekha pointing her fingers to the old Omrao began in a rather tremulous voice exhibiting much struggle within, "He is my revered father-in-law. He was the chief of Burdwan, in the *Suba* of Bengal ;—you might remember that Sher Afgan was sent there by your illustrious grand-father as the ruler. He slew my husband and took me to his wife Meherunessa, now the world-renowned Nurjahan as her Bandi. Sher Afgan

made a forcible conversion of all the members of my family, and overwhelmed with a sense of shame and remorse my old father-in-law, who was an orthodox Brahmin, left his native land with my darling Lulia in his bosom,—I came to Agra with Nurjahan as her Bandi. But I must admit that I was more treated as a companion and a friend than as a maid servant. But the day that scoundrel Sher Afgan completed his roguery and vandalism upon us, we promised by the name of the Almighty to be properly revenged, and since then all our actions and movements pointed to that one aim, and we shall live to the day of the fulfilment of our mission of life."

She suddenly stopped. An unnatural fire shone in her eyes, and the scarlet of her lips was brilliant,—these are indications of strong inward emotions. She resumed the narration of the story after a long pause, in a voice of such keen bitterness and withering acrimony that it seemed a demoness spoke within that ascetic frame, "Pardon me, Prince, my heart is at times the prey of friends who infuse into my veins a horrible madness ;—if you go down, down into my heart, there you will find the word 'vengeance' write large upon it, but pray, don't take me to be a vile woman for my vengeance is not contaminated by any worldly touch, it is hallowed by the glow of religious sanctity ;—now to my story,—Sher Afgan, you know received due punishment at the hands of God, he was murdered, by the hands of assassin, and his wife was snatched away from his

bosom so to say ! The punishment was no doubt sufficient, but it was not complete, for the wife of that villain is now the Empress of India, and my poor self is still very lately her *Bandi*—how to make ample reparation for it ?—That day I took a solemn vow before my god to make my Lulia, wherever I get her—to be the Empress of India—and not only that she will be the second Nurjahan, but the real Nurjahan will be subservient to her will, will be an object of pity, a seeker of favour before my daughter ;—noble Prince, for over twenty years this was the ruling passion of my life, one maddening thought which goaded me to any extreme, and to-day I am to attain the consummation of my desires, to-day my Lulia is going to be the Taj Mahal, for I am confident that a devoted chaste wife's prediction is ever to be fulfilled. I see in my prophetic vision that in the course of ten days you will adorn the throne of Delhi, and my Lulia will shine on your left side at that time." Julekha in the exuberance of her feeling and carried away by the plethora of imagination, and raising her voice to a higher pitch said, "Then Nurjahan will be an object of pity to your Taj Mahal—and seek the favour of my daughter for raising the amount of her monthly allowance——"

Lulia interrupting most feelingly ejaculated, "Mother, pardon me, I shall never be able to play the part you assign to me ; I shall serve her as a loving daughter and she will receive my service as a mother."

The Prince with great enthusiasm, almost half rising from his seat ejaculated, "Excellent, my Taj Mahal, this is what I wish, this is worthy of the Empress of India !"

In a voice of musical cadence, but with a ring of pain throughout she rejoined, "Oh ! my sweet Lulia ! I shall not return to Mogul Courts to teach you politics, I shall for the remaining period of my days continue to worship the deity which reigns within the empire of my soul, I shall die worshipping at the feet of that God ! Lulia, my mother, you are right, I am mistaken, it is ingratitude to be angry with Nurjahan, who loved me as her own younger sister. I left her as my further service was an impediment to realization of my aim. Mother, allow me to retire now, I shall see you again the day when you will sit by the side of the noble Prince now before me on the throne of Delhi, when you will shine and illumine Agra. I shall then come to ask the pardon of Nurjahan, a thousand times, falling at her feet, to-day the one hope of my life is realized, the mission of my life fulfilled !"

For a long time pindrop silence reigned supremely in that hall, and then the Shahazada slowly began, "Holy mother ! allow me to congratulate you on the sublimity of thy aim. You were the daughter of a brave hero, and the wife of a distinguished general, the solemn vow you took was quite worthy of you ! Now bless me with your best wishes that the aim of my life

be fulfilled, that your daughter might shine as the crown of the Begum Mahal !

Julekha returned, "The expression that falls from the lips of a chaste Hindu lady will ever turn out to be true, know it for certain, you noble Prince."

The Prince added, "Now I feel a good deal of curiosity about you all, I want to know all about you, who is this Hamida——"

Julekha rejoined, "From to-day she ceases to be Hamida—this Hamida was one day the famous *Panwali* of Agra, known by the name of Gangia, but she is neither Hamida nor Gangia, but she is known to us as Shama's mother :—in my absence she brought up Lulia with more care and attention than I could have bestowed, I am her mother only by virtue of the fact that she came out of my loins, but this *Sharma* is her real mother !"

Shahazada said, "If fortune favours, this Hamida——"

"No Prince, she is not Hamida, but *Sharma*."

"I shall properly reward this Shama's mother."

"There stands Behari Charan, the husband of this Shama's mother. He was our servant from his infancy, but to speak you the truth, he was our right-hand man, our success is entirely due to his marvellous powers, I would not have been able to make over my Lalita to you had he not been with us."

The Prince with smiling countenance remarked, "I did not know that Mahammad Jan and Behari

Charan are the one and the same person, but if I ever become the king, I thought of making him the state ventriloquist, but I have changed my mind and think of giving him the post of Oozir or the executive head of the Empire."

Behari Charan with folded arms and in a supplicating tone submitted, "I pray, you, Prince of the Prince, I shall not be able to do Justice to the post of the Oozir, although I can well imitate the voice of a dog or a horse."

Those present burst into a fit of laughter ;—the old man, the banished and excommunicated late Raja first broke his silence and in a grave voice remarked. "The auspicious hour for the performance of the happy ceremony is now come, let us begin it. We have much more to say, let us wait till due time arrives."

The ceremony then began without further narration. The ceremony was properly gone through according to Hindu rites and the old man addressd the Prince thus "Noble Prince, for our own satisfaction all the Hindu rites have been observed in this connection, but I am confident that our Lulia will one day be the Empres of India, and at that time, those who are inimically disposed towards you, might say that Lulia was not lawfully married to you, under the circumstances I propose that the ceremony may be performed according to Mahamedan rites as well. We have made the necessary preparation."

Shahazada replied. "Yes, you have done just after my liking. I would have proposed it in the absence of any, for in the event of my gaining the throne, there would have much noise about it, I beg to thank you for this wise suggestion."

The Maulavi was ready with the necessary preparation for the performance of the ceremony and he was waiting in the mosque. In one night Lulia went through two different sorts of marriage ceremonies, it is strange no doubt. In the mosque the marriage ceremonies were performed according to the Mahamadan system and religion, and they both for the first time signed "*Shajihan* and *Taj Mahal*", it is generally believed that those signatures still exist in a mutilated form.

There was no time to be lost. It was arranged that they should leave Fatepur Sikri before daybreak and that Behari Charan would escort the bridal pair, viz the Prince and Lulia to the court of the Maharana of Udaypur, and thence he would retire to Mount Girnar. Sarbasundari and her old father-in-law with *Shamarna* would anxiously wait for the news of the safe arrival of the prince and his wife in the court of Udaypur;—they would then themselves start for journey to the court of the Maharana to join with the prince.

That very night after the ceremony had been performed they all made themselves busy for the preparation of the journey. Heaven alone knows whether any

misfortune would attend the journey of the happy royal pair to Udaypur, whether they would at all reach that place the only safe abode for them, in this transition period of their life !

CHAPTER XXV

ON THE WAY TO RAJASTHAN

The ranges of Aravalli hills have towered to the sky. These beautiful hills are covered over with fine trees, plants and creepers. Underneath it was all gravel with only sandy extensive deserts. These are the confines of that famous country Rajputana—at a short distance the celebrated empire of Mewar, the land of heroes.

The pass here was narrow enough. By its side there was a small valley through which a rivulet ran with roaring sound. Close by there was no other water supply. Persons from a considerable distance always come to this valley for the cool water of the stream. Pot-bellied Rajput ladies are in evidence here the whole day with water-pots on their heads, but to-day the crowd became a little greater. Rajput peasants with the plough on their shoulders, Rajput cowherds letting loose their cattle on the peak, the ladies setting afloat their vessels on the breast of the stream—all these were assembled on the same spot. And the reason was not far to seek. At the foot of a tree on the bank of the river a *Bhairaba* and a *Bhairabi* have taken their abode to-day, the like of whom were

not seen before ; it is the above reason that persons of all ages had rushed to the spot from far-off villages.

The age of the *Bhairaba* was about five and twenty while his comrade was sixteen. Their body was besmeared with sacred ashes through which they were resplendent with the grace like the bright full moon under dark clouds. No body ever saw such bewitching beauty before. The elderly ladies said openly, "Blessed are those that are the authors of these beings." Old persons remarked with due reverence, "What ravishing beauty !" In fact, all persons present exclaimed, "Oh ! how lucky is Rajasthan ! To-day the universal father and mother have left their abode—the Himalayas—and have appeared here in person."

In front of them their fire was burning. The couple clad in tiger's skin were seated on the hide of an antelope. With a pair of dread tongs beside the *Bhairaba*, with an awe-inspiring vermilion-bedaubed trident in the right hand of his companion and with a loin-wearing, long-haired, hemp-smoking old disciple busy preparing bread with the fire in question—such a spectacle was quite a novelty with the people of Rajasthan.

Every one stepped up to the holy couple and made their profound obeisance. Many a person remained seated at distance with folded hands and with their anxious modest look rivetted upon them. Those that were bolder, especially elderly ladies—some of them begged for medicines, while others for children—in word. every Rajput—a true follower of Shiva—was

craving for their life's hankering at the hands of these holy souls. But they were absorbed in deep meditation with their eyes closed and with no articulation even of a syllable.

The preparation of the bread being over, the old attendant beckoned to all present to clear away from the spot. By raising his hand to his mouth he intimated that his master and mistress would now sit down to their meal, and that was why he asked the visitors to withdraw. Many of them understood what he meant, but some seemingly could not. Many of them moved to a good distance while some still persisted. Then the old man took a dreadful sacrificial knife close by and with it advanced towards the crowd. At this all screamed out in fear, "A veritable Nandi (Shiva's servant) he is, let us all run away."

When the crowd dispersed, the *Bhairaba* opened his eyes and burst out laughing with the words.—"How bothersome it is to become a Badshah ! How harrassing is the love of one's life ! What simulations and dissimulations I have to practise ! How differently I have had to represent myself within the space of one month !"

"When once in safety, Lord" said the lady in reply, "You will be freed from all such worry for good and all."

"Mam Taj Mahal—" uttered the Prince with a deep sigh.

"I am Lulia to you all my life, Lord of my worship" returned the lady.

Behari Charan, while serving the bread, interposed, "To us you are no other than Lulia always."

Khurum said in a smile.—"Lulia, my lady, I am determined to become Badshah for your sake ; to speak the truth, I would have turned out a Fakir by this time had you not met my eyes."

"Why do you feel so sad, Hajrat (Lord)?" was the pitiful reply.

"No longer a Hajrat," rejoined the prince jocosely. "Now a *Bhairaba*—a veritable Shiva. To be plain, by representing myself as a *Bhairba* I am inclined to believe when mere representation gives me so much pleasure, I know not what amount of pleasure the reality would have afforded me with such a companion as you, I would not care two pence for the throne of Delhi even."

"Lord of my heart, I never aspire for the Imperial throne. I am happy in having you. Wherever you go, this devoted servant of yours would follow you like a shadow" re-assured the princess.

Taking a piece of bread the prince said. "Just see, my love, my heart simply bursts out to offer you this piece of hard bread."

"My Lord, the royal blood of Mewar runs through your veins ; you just recall to mind what the illustrious Pratap Singh and his worthy consort said, just call to mind what your noble grand-father—Akbar the Great,

wrote to him. To me this is nothing short of royal enjoyment," was the modest reply.

Without caring for decency and decorum the Prince now drew his adored Lulia to his bosom even at such a public place and gave her a tender kiss. The old Behari Charan had only to close his eyes at such a proceeding on the part of the prince who observed.—

"Right you are, my jem. You are fit for the throne of the whole universe and why of Delhi alone."

They now sat down to their meals together. Lulia said again and again,—“Dearest, you just take your meal first and then I will.”

“At this Khurum put the bread where it was, saying.—No, in that case I won’t.”

Consequently Lulia asked her darling to do what he wished. Khurum put the bread into her mouth, and Lulia gulped it down with her eyes closed.

Both of them had just arrived at the very confines of Mewar through the help of Behari Charan who possessed extraordinary simulating powers. They were not yet out of danger, had enough cause of fear. They are always under the misgiving that the spy of the Empress, though not of the Emperor, was chasing them. They would not be in safety until they arrived at Mewar. The understanding was that Sarbasundari (Julekha) would any how intimate the Maharana Karna Singh of Mewar about them before she and her party left for the mount of Girnar,—so it was hoped that

the Maharana would never sit idle at home, but would send his own men to them for their reception, if not come in person. Once he sets his foot on the soil of Mewar, he would be a guest there and so his life at least would no longer be in jeopardy as the Rajputs would lay down their lives for their sake ; this was their belief. So go they must a little further. They were not in the least inclined to take food or rest here. It was only because Lulia had got fatigued that they had to halt here—at the foot of the tree, besides, Behari Charan, chief minister at this time, was the last person to allow them to move further without taking meals and rest. And whatever he told them to do, they could not but follow. Hence they halted here.

While taking her meal Lulia said,—“Behari Dada (brother)—my mind misgives me that the Emperor’s spy is near at hand.”

“If it is only one or two,” returned Behari Charan with reddened eyes, “then—though I am born of a cowherd and not of a blacksmith—I would sacrifice them with this knife with the words ‘Victory to mother Kali’ as offerings to Her.”

Then he corrected himself with a laugh.—“Upon God, I have made a mistake. I have been a Mahamadan, Mahammad Jan by name so long and so I would chop them off before your Lordship by inches after the fashion of the Mahamadans.”

“Behari Charan,” returned the Prince rather Jocular-

ly, "My maternal side considered, I am nothing short of a Hindu. My mother was but a Hindu and so also her mother. As for my father, I do not know what religion he follows, as he is not particular on that point. My grand father, the late illustrious Akbar Shah openly forsook Islamism. Under the circumstances you can chop them off at one stroke after the Hindu method as well as chop them by inches after the Mahamadan fashion."

"Then I find your Lordship's religion is superior," was the modest reply.

"How so, "Behari Charan" queried the Prince with a laugh.

"Once sacrificed after the Hindu method" rejoined Behari Charan, "re-sacrifice after the Mahamedan method is out of the question. Consequently to carry out your Lordship's orders means sacrifice after the Islam method and when flouncing about, that must be followed by a stroke with this weapon. It is, therefore, that your Lordship's religion gets the upper hand."

"Should the Great Disposer of events ever smile on this poor self," re-assured the prince, "you shall have a reward."

"People when in position," said Behari Charan with clashed arms, "forget about what they promise to others, especially to the poor and the vagabond."

In a moment Behari Charan became silent and listened attentively and with a Jump he exclaimed,—
"Sister. you are right."

"At this both the Prince and the princess left their food behind, stood up in a fright, saying in dismay,—
"Well, what is up, Behari Charan?—Badshah's people!"

"Sister, just listen, yonder," was the bluff reply from Behari Charan.

CHAPTER XXVI

THE DERVISH

Both the Prince and the Princess listened with attention, but they heard nothing but the low subdued voice of people rather at a distance. Those that were afar, awaiting the completion of their meals, it is they who were talking

"Where, where is the noise, you mean, Behari Dada?" questioned Lulia.

"There you are" responded Behari Charan.

Both the Prince and the Princess understood that it must be some particular sound which led Behari Charan to suspect that the Badshah's men had come closeby. He was now cogitating what steps should be taken. But neither the Prince nor his lady could hear any noise of the kind excepting that of the vistsors at a distance

But they heard through the noise somebody shouting out—"Be good enough to see that something is given through your kindness."

"You indiscreet fool" was the response.

Both of them turned their gaze towards Behari Charan astonished and amazed.

"Dulali," replied Behari Charan.

"Eh ! Dulali ? what is the remedy now ?" exclaimed Lulia in dismay.

"Oh ! Dulali, she is our friend, no fear," re-assured the Prince. Behari Charan spoke not a word. He was busy listening to something else with a fixed attention.

Lulia now observed,—“Mother kept Dulali in watch on us so that she would intimate as soon as the Badshah's spy could get a clue to our whereabouts. It is evident, therefore, that the spy must be here.”

At this stage Behari Charan ejaculated, “Gaharjan.”

“Who is he ?” anxiously demanded the Prince.

“My Lord ! I have hardly any time to tell you all about him. Remember he is Nurjahan's spy replied Behari Charan.

“If he is alone, what fear ? I can easily cope with him,” returned the Prince

“Lord ! Gaharjan is not the person to come single handed. We thought no body had come to know our whereabouts, but when this damned devil has got scent of us, then surely he has not come alone,” rejoined Behari Charan.

“No fear if he has only a few persons with him,” returned the Prince.

“Don't think of that, Prince, who knows we are not hemmed in on all sides.” observed Behari Charan.

“Then, what is the remedy ?” exclaimed Lulia in an anxious tone.

At first Behari Charan became a little agitated ; but

he composed himself at once re-assuring,—“No fear. There is a remedy. Get up quick—stand up.”

Dulali shouted out from a distance,—“What sort of Hindus and Rajputs you are ! There our deity—mother Annapurna (giver of rice) incarnate ; with her consort she is taking her meals, and there you allow this Dervish—a Mahamedan—access. Should they happen to see this face during their meals, they will stop eating. You cannot conceive what ruin would befall Rajputana in that case.”

Then most of the visitors exclaimed with one voice,—“Reverend Sir, beg your pardon. Don't go that way. This way—this way.”

During the Mogul regime the Maulavis and Dervishes exercised so much influence that even the Rajputs were afraid of giving them any cause that would incur their displeasure.

The Dervish said in a testy tone,—“Whatever I choose to do, do I must. You go away, infidels. You know who I am ?”

“Whoever you may be, you are at best but a Mahamedan” replied Dulali.

Every one exclaimed with one voice,—“Right, right. You shall not be allowed to go that way.”

The ladies burst forth,—“We will belabour you with these vessels.”

Then many of them said in a rage,—“Beat, beat, beat.”

“Joy to Shiva” shouted out Dulali.”

Behari Charan heaving a breath of relief said,—
“No more fear. All these people will put an end to Gaharjan’s worldly career. We need not tarry here any longer ; two hours more, we will get to Mewar where we will be free from any danger.”

All on a sudden there was a sound of bugle on the peaks of mountains all around re-sounding, “Victory to Akbar the Great, O God.”

“I find we are hemmed in on all sides and so we are captives here. Now, where are the arms ? We won’t die as cats and dogs,—must die fighting.”

Now that Bhairaba-dressed Prince, intent on fighting valiantly unsheathed his sword which had remained all along within the bundle on Behari Charan’s head and so was unused so long ; and Lulia, on her part, took the dread knife in her hand, saying,—“I, too, know how to brandish this weapon which I have learnt from brother.”

The Prince retraced his steps. He was quite stupefied with the spectacle he saw—before him the awe-inspiring image of Mother Durga !

“Should I be engaged in the action there is no chance of your escape. It is, therefore, I am going to surrender myself—to allow myself a captive. For my sake you would be spared,” observed the Prince.

The unsophisticated girl with her bosom swelling like a lioness returned rather with choked voice,—
“It is a thousand pities you have not been able to fathom your Lulia yet. Know, if I have to lose you,

what is the good of preserving this life? I do not care a straw for the Imperial throne. It is you and you alone I want. Come, let us fight to death which will ensure us eternal happiness even in Heaven where there is no worry or woe of any kind."

"Let it be so, then," with these words the Prince neared her, adding.—"Remain behind me."

Lulia returned in an emphatic tone—"No dear, I will remain at your side. I am your better half."

At this time the Mogul army made their entrance in rows through a side of the valley, but lo! they became quite amazed at this un-dreamt of sight and could not advance further. This was a sight quite novel to them. The handsome *Bhairaba* with the handsomer *Bhairabi* were standing with the sword and knife in their hands. Their eyes were emitting heavenly fire and at their foot there was an ash-bedaubed person with an awful trident in hand ready to lay down his life for their sake! How sublime—how dreadful—how hair-standing! The Mogul cavalry took their stand holding in their horses. Like wooden dolls they began to feast their eyes on this wonderful scene.

By another side of the valley the Dervish-dressed Gaharjan appeared mounting a cadaverous horse and he, too, could not advance at the sight of such a thing. He began to look astonished, amazed and dismayed. At this juncture Behari Charan ejaculated with a jump, "No more fear."

Behari Cbaran had the super-human power of

hearing what others could not. His powers of hearing were unique. He exclaimed.—“The Rajput army has come; so there is no more anxiety. Their horses’ trotting has fallen upon my ears.”

And whatever Behari Charan did now was enough to infuse fear into the hearts of the Moguls who looked all around. Behari Charan alone could echo the voice of at least a hundred persons, a proof of which he gave to the Badshah himself when he uttered a cry at Marium Begum’s Palace. With such a voice he shouted out, resounding the whole sky,—“Victory to Prince Shahjahan.”

This dreadful noise resounded the hills and valleys. Before that sound mixed itself up with the air the whole sky resounded again.—“Victory to Rajasthan !”

This was immediately followed by numberless Rajput heroes who entered the valley on horse-back trotting in extreme vehemence. The moment they arrived, they surrounded both the Prince and the Princess. One of them demanded in a loud tone,—

“Which General is the leader of this army ?”

“Mahammad Toki” was the reply.

“Toki Sahib I presume you can make out who I am” said the Rajput hero.

“Certainly, Karna Singh, Maharana of Mewar, is before us in person.” replied Mahammad Toki.

“Know, then, that the Prince is my guest now—not only of me, but of all Rajasthan, you know it full well

that the Rajput guest is above harm" observed Karna Singh.

"To cause the arrest of the Prince and to bring him up before His Majesty is the Imperial mandate." re-joined Mahmmad Toki.

"Not under the present circumstances." returned Karna Singh, "for this would cause unnecessary bloodshed, you must know. It is not that I only have come; Gaja Singh of Marwar and Ajit Singh of Amber are joining us. All Rajasthan are prepared for the action. In consultation with all of them I have invited the Prince. I have invited him as a friend, I have given him shelter, he is at present our guest. You just go back. The Badshah is prudent enough to understand all this. Should he voluntarily cause a conflagration for his son, his throne would go to rack and ruin. So go back, do not, for Heaven's sake, cause unnecessary carnage. Tell him all this in my name. Tell him also this—"So long as the Badshah is alive, the Rajputs would keep an eye upon the Prince so that he would not behave ill with his father and that after his demise Prince Khurum would be raised to the throne of Delhi under the name of Emperor Shahjahan. So. go back. go back."

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE FAMOUS TURBAN.

Mahammad Toki was not a fool. With only fifty Moguls under him he came to arrest the Prince. His impression was that as the Prince was proceeding to Mewar quite alone and in a disguise, it would be but easy for him to arrest him while on the way. He never dreamt that this arrest would cost him so much trouble. That he would find the Prince on the way to Mewar, that the Dervish would identify him, that he would get his arrest and bring him up before His Majesty was the Imperial mandate. He did not know that Karna Singh would come in person with five thousand men for his safety, so to fight under the circumstances would end only in disappointment. Without uttering a syllable, therefore, he turned the face of his horse, and in a short time the Mogul army became out of sight.

At this stage Karna Singh jumped down from his horse. Now Prince Khurum addressed him rather with heavy eyes,—“You are a true friend of mine. Your brother Bhim Singh was a bosom-friend of mine, in fact, he laid down his life for my sake, an affliction I cannot forget even in my life.” With these words he asked Lulia to bring up his turban.

Karna Singh said in a smile,—“To speak the truth, this dress quite fits you. The royal dress is nothing in comparison with this.”

The dress, turban—everything was within Behari Charan’s bundle. Lulia hastened away from the spot and having fetched it handed it over to the Prince. Now the Prince observed,—“Maharana, the exchange of turbans means fraternal affection that knows no snapping—a time-honoured custom. Just grant me permission, so that I shall feel gratified.”

At this Karna Singh at once put off his own turban and put it on the Prince’s head whereas the Prince in his turn, put his own on Karna Singh’s head with due respect which was followed by a deep mutual embrace. At this spectacle the Rajput heroes stirred the whole atmosphere shouting out, “Cheers to the Maharana.” Karna Singh, now turning towards his own men exclaimed,—“Cheers to the Emperor Shahjahan.”

On hearing this five thousand Rajputs echoed with one voice,—“Cheers to the Emperor Shahjahan.”

Verily, Akbar the Great had founded his empire on love and the Mogul empire would never have its downfall but for the cursed Aurangzeb and by this time the Hindus and the Musalmans would have been united in the ties of fraternal affection.

Up to this day this turban of Prince Khurum has been preserved with great care at the unique Marble Palace of Udaypur ; even up to this day the Maharana of Udaypur worships this turban as a God. Unfortu-

nately Maharana's head-dress has not been preserved ; if it were so, that too, would have received the same universal adoration.

The Maharana did not notice the Princess yet ; now, all on a sudden, his eyes having fallen upon that lady he exclaimed quite surprisingly,—“Who is this lady ?”

Nobody had hitherto come to know about Khurum's marriage. Now the Prince held his lady's arms out of affection, saying,—“It is this lady who is my only Princess, by name Mam Tajmahal.”

At this the Maharana fixed his gaze on the Princess in astonishment, observing at the same time,—“A veritable Tajmahal. But”—

“But what, your Majesty ” questioned the Prince anxiously.

The Rana replied in a scruple.—“I was not aware of this. There is no conveyance with me of any kind for the lady to go in.”

“I know how to ride, Maharana,” said Lulia rather smilingly.

In fact, Karna Singh was literally bewildered with the Princess's bewitching beauty as well as her winning manners. He only observed,—“No wonder,”

“Then we need not tarry here any longer,” interposed the Prince,

“No, we need not,” returned the Maharana.

Then he ordered a general to get a couple of swift horses caparisoned.

Then the Prince turning back shouted out,—“Behari Charan.”

“Oh! Behari Charan. He is not here,” replied the Princess.

Then a search after Behari Charan began to be made in all directions, but he had mysteriously disappeared. All the search for him proved fruitless—he could not be traced out.

“Probably Behari Charan has gone in search of Dulali,” said the Princess.

The Prince now told the Maharana everything about Behari Charan and Dulali, not omitting to relate everything about the Dervish also. Then hundreds of Rajputs moved heaven and earth to get a clue of either of these three. Then what was the good of tarrying here?

“There is no cause of anxiety for brother Behari. He must have gone on some business which concerns us. So let us go,” observed the Princess.

Now all of them prepared to make for Mewar. Now the Prince said with a laugh,—“What’s the good of having this dress any longer? I have got my dress with me.”

“No, no,” replied the Maharana, “you must have this dress until you get to Mewar. Let people know that I brought the Prince in the garb of a *Sannaysin* and it is I who sent him in the dress of the Emperor. Let all Rajasthan feast their eyes on the mother’s image because when she is metamorphosed into Tajmahal nobody would have the fortune of seeing her again.”

This exactly came to pass after a decade. The Prince and the Princess appeared as *Sannasin* in Udaypur and here it was in this Udaypur palace—he was proclaimed as Emperor Shahjahan for the first time before he set out for Delhi.

The eminent historian Todd writes in his Rajasthan, "In the picturesque beautiful Marble Palace situate within this island the Prince Khurum lived quite happily. Here at this palace Mahabat Khan joined him and took his shelter. Some of the Prince's Mahamedan friends joined him also. Gradually a new palace was erected in this big beautiful island. His Mahamedan comrades hoisted up a crescent emblem of Islamism at the top of this palace. The Rajputs received this with alacrity. The Maharana fitted this magnificent mansion with various precious stones as well as with embroidered carpets. A beautiful throne was sculptured out of a piece of marble and erected for the Emperor in order that his honour remained intact. This throne was placed on beautiful female figures carved out of marble. Within the court-yard a pretty tomb was built in honour of Fakir Madar. The Prince lived in this palace, second to none, for a good many years. According to some he is said to go to Persia or Golconda on the eve of his father's (Jahangir) death. But as soon as he had heard of this unwelcome tidings of his father, he returned to Udaypur. Here it was he was proclaimed as Emperor Shahjahan."

Oh ! what tyranny, what "persecution have crushed

down Mewar during these hundreds of years ! Oh ! how often has Mewar been ransacked by the Mogul, the Pathan and the Maharatta ! But the Prince's turban—that tie fraternal affection—has been preserved there with due respect. We find the turban which passed on from the Mogul head to that of the Rajput is in the same condition even now. So long as the Mewar family will be in existence, so long the light over *Madar's* tomb will not run short of oil.

Can you, reader, find such fraternal affection elsewhere under the sun ?

CHAPTER XXVIII

ON THE WAY TO RAJASTHAN.

It is not with the object of threatening Mahammad Toki that Maharana Karna Singh gave all this blustering. Truly the Kings of Marwar and Amber, the right and left hands of the Mogul respectively, pledged themselves to protect the Prince Khurum.

From the time of Akbar the Great Rajasthan practically became the moving spring of the Mogul Kingdom. There was no such political affair in which the Rajput interfered not. Man Singh of Amber was Akbar's right hand. Virtually speaking, this Man Singh had all the rank and honour next to Akbar. During Jahangir's regime Maharajas of Amber and Marwar were practically his right-hand men. Over and above, Bhim Singh, the Mewar Prince, had unbounded influence in the Mogul Court; and as for Mahabat Khan, who was a Mahamedan by name only, was a Mewar prince—a Rajput. Circumstances were so placed that the Emperor could not dream of raising his head against the Rajput chiefs.

It has already been stated that the upright Emperor Jahangir was quite aware of the worthlessness of his eldest son Parbesh. With all that, Parbesh being the eldest, to whom the father's throne was naturally due,

Jahangir proclaimed him as the would-be successor to the throne after him. But he knew quite well that Parbesh could not remain as Emperor unless the Rajputs were in his side; and it is for this reason that he invited the Rajput chiefs and requested them to side with Parbesh. The Maharajas of Amber and Marwar gave their word in favour of Parbesh, but Bhim Singh and Mahabat Khan of Mewar could not be won over. And what followed afterwards, we all know. But inwardly Jahangir loved Khurum more, him he knew to be smart and quite fit for the throne. Whatever Akbar the Great failed to do, Prince Khurum carried that into execution. He it was who brought Mewar under subjugation to the Mogul throne. He it was who could bring the renowned Pratap Singh's son, Amar Singh, under humiliation to the Mogul Court.

Jahangir writes in his famous autobiography 'Shahnama,'—

"I did not succeed in conquering Mewar within seven years since I became Emperor. The Maharana with his valiant son Karna Singh ruined my big army times without number."

"Hijri 1022—The eighth year of my reign—when I settled my plan of my going to Ajmer, I asked my beloved son Khurum to take the lead while on the way. When the hour for our departure arrived, I arrayed him with various costly dress of honour, gave him elephants, horses, swords, shields, sabres—all these as presents. In addition to his own men, I asked

Ajof Khan to escort him with two thousand horsemen. In fact, I honoured every one with presents befitting their respective positions."

"Then the ninth year—I was sitting on the throne one day when my beloved Khurum wrested from the Maharana his famous elephant, Alam Gomal by name, together with other seventeen elephants and sent these over home. All these animals were presented before me. The following day I took a tour round the city mounting that 'Alam Gomal' and on this auspicious occasion I distributed thousands of gold coins."

Within a few days the most welcome intelligence arrived that Khurum had completely defeated the haughty Maharana. The Maharana Amar Singh has at last condescended to appear before me and pay homage to me, and Khurum had placed his own army in several of the forts belonging to the Maharana.—My empire had been extended throughout all Mewar. But this country being quite a desert without any streams, I do not consider it worth my while to keep it comprised within my empire. And the country being a constant prey to the depredations of my army the Maharana is obliged to come under my subjugation at last. If he persisted in fighting with us, either he would have fallen into my son's hands as a captive or he would have to fly from the country as a fugitive, and consequently his empire would have come to an end. Resolving all this within his mind the Maharana has sent two of his chief ministers Supakarna and Hari

Das Jhala, by name, to my son with the words.—“Should the Prince kindly pardon him and accept these two men, he would come in person and pay his homage and like the other Rajputs he would send his eldest son Karna Singh to the Imperial Court to attend to His Majesty. And he himself being old enough, he should be exempted from attending the court.” A detailed account of these has been sent to me by my son Khurum through Sakur Ulla Afzal Ali.

Thus after a good many years the independence of Mewar had its decline at the hands of Khurum, or in other words, the glory of Mewar increased a thousand-fold. Mewar, which Prince Khurum trampled under foot—it was that very downtrodden Mewar—which gave the prince shelter during his exile and it was that Mewar which helped him in obtaining the throne of Delhi. Consequently the overthrow of Mewar was not, properly speaking, an overthrow, but a conquest for it. Though not sovereign of Delhi, it was this Mewar which created a sovereign. So who got the better of the two,—Mewar or Khurum,—reader?

The Prince Khurum who at one time chased the Mewar Rajputs from one mountain to another—Khurum who at one time fought terribly with Karna Singh and drove out his indomitable men throwing them up like cotton—to-day that Khurum, that same exiled Khurum, though in the garb of an ascetic escorted by Karna Singh, was taken to Udaypur with pomp and pageantry. Now, who should be called the greater of

the two—the conqueror or the conquered? Those persons who fighting with one another as deadly enemies flooded the Mewar empire with blood at one time—to-day, those very persons were riding as pledged brothers with the exchange of turbans on the inaccessible hilly paths of Mewar. Such glory, such catholicity of views are worthy of Pratap Singh's land, such a scene is traceable nowhere on the face of the earth.

Prince Khurum was a hero in the true sense of the word and that is the simple reason why he comprehended the intrinsic worth of a hero and that is why he proved to be a true friend of the Mewar heroes after a dreadful war, Mewar heroes, in their turn, too, comprehended his true worth, and that is the simple reason why Maharana Karna Singh of Mewar was ready to fight against the Emperor Jahangir for the sake of his friend and that is why the Maharanas of Marwar and Amber—Delhi's right-hand men,—were resolved upon protecting the Prince with him at his request.

Within the valley Gaja Singh and Ajit Singh pitched their tents within the big encampment with their own army. Karna Singh with the Prince and the Princess arrived there and joined them. The Maharanas of Marwar and Amber, both of them, held the Prince in deep embrace. Parbeah was no more in the land of the living and so they were not bound to redeem their promise but were at perfect liberty to render to the prince any help they thought necessary. And as for Nurjahan, they were not satisfied with her, especially

as they had come to know that Nurjahan was trying her utmost to place her own son-in-law Sariyar on the throne of Delhi, For all these reasons they gave the Prince a very hearty reception with due respect; and the Prince, on his part, pledged himself, out of respect to these people, not to raise his head directly or indirectly against his father so long he would be alive and that is why there was no blood-shed or ruptures of any kind towards the closing days of the Emperor. But how inscrutable are the ways of Fate! Khurum never stood in the way of his father's mental peace as every body knows, but it is a known fact that this peace did not fall to his lot as his sons proved a bore to their father in the evening of his life. His son Aurangzeb made away with his brothers and having confined his father as a prisoner ascended the throne of Delhi. Old Shahjahan, while thus incarcerated within the palace, met his death. What sin on his part brought him to such a sad plight is known to the Omniscient Father alone.

Now the Prince took his shelter in the Rajput camp within the inaccessible valley on the way to Rajasthan. He did not entertain the hope of getting his father's throne ere long, but he now got rid of the fear of his life—he was in the midst of peace for which he was sorely anxious.

CHAPTER XXIX.

WHO IS TAJMAHAL ?

The wise and astute Gaja Singh remarked, "No doubt, Shahazada looks pre-eminently charming in his new costume, we have been greatly moved and touched by it,—but the dictates of politics would rather advise him to change his dress now. To-day the people of Rajputana have been struck by the extraordinarily fascinating appearance of the Prince, but to-morrow they might take a different view, and they might even lose their natural equanimity and put a wrong interpretation upon the whole thing. They might say that Shahazada being a Mahamedan, his mendicant dress is a slur upon the religion of the Hindus—a very difficult situation would then be created !

The truth contained in the suggestion, the force of the above argument did not occur to Karna Singh at the beginning, but he now confirmed the truth of the above remark by saying, "Quite so, the chief of Marwar has made a very pertinent remark."

The Shahazada ejaculated, "I was just going to change my dress there."

Gaja Singh in a grave voice added, "Shahazada must visit Rajwara in a style and dignity consistent with his position, the Begum Shaheb must do the same.—

grave question of politics is involved in it, any disregard of it might be fraught with serious consequence !

The Prince with much alacrity said, "My dearest friend, and you dear brother, I am quite ready and willing to abide by your decision."

Accordingly the Shahazada changed his ascetic dress and wore rich and gorgeous costume befitting his position ;—for head dress he had to put on the one used by the chief of Marwar. The most charmingly handsome person of Lulia was bedecked with jewelleries of the highest value, and in her new Begum dress, she appeared a unique figure ! She was taken to a camp most luxuriously fitted up, and servants were sent for bringing conveyance worthy of her position ! To-day the freedom-loving, simple child of nature, our ever familiar Lulia, is like a prisoner of the state with all the pomp and ceremony due to her new station of life ! But she was not at all satisfied with her new life, and sighing a deep sigh, she began to think in her mind, "I prefer the life of a poor man's wife to this high life of a Begum, there is happiness, there is freedom in that simple life of a peasant's wife, but it is all gone now ! Perhaps, I shall be deprived of the happiness of seeing once a day the Lord of my life !"

At first she strongly objected to her being dressed in that rich costume ;—but to the wishes and request of the Shahazada, she most implicitly submitted. When Shahazada said, "that for the sake of ourselves, and in obedience to the dictates of prudence and politics, we

ought to be so dressed." Lulia obeyed him, though she was not at all happy in her new costume, in her life ! She keenly felt the pangs of separation from her grandfather, of whom she was so devotedly fond, Behari Charan and Shama's mother with whom she was associated as a brother and sister from her very infancy, and from Dulali her boon companion. Indeed a sense of indescribable pain and anguish took entire possession of her soul, but the constant companionship of the Prince was a proper compensation for this irreparable loss, but to-day she was going to be deprived of that privilege. She felt herself to be bird imprisoned in a golden cage. She murmured within herself. "Is this the happiness connected with the exalted position of the Badsha Begum ? I don't hanker after it, my soul panteth after the happiness, connected with the undisturbed peace of my humble life in the ruins of Fatepur Sikri, with Khurum, the Lord of my life !"

The Prince with Karna Singh was seated in the camp after dinner when Shahazada asked, "Maharana, my dear friend, will you kindly explain how you came to know that I have come here, in this particular place just at this time in the assumed garb of an ascetic ? Prey, enlighten me on this point !"

To which Karna Singh replied most eagerly, "Thank you, Prince, excuse me, I forgot to make over a letter to you."

In a tone expressive of extreme surprise Shahazada asked, "Whose letter is that, Maharana ?"

"I don't know that, Prince, this letter—Gangia, I presume you know, perhaps heard of Gangia Panwali,—the famous Panwali Gangia!"

"Oh yes! I must have heard of her name."

This Gangia brought this news to me. She told me that under the garb of a *Sannyashi*, you had been coming to Marwar, that in the morning you would reach here, that this fact was known to that astute queen Nurjahan, who sent Mahammad Toki to capture you. She further told me that only an immediate march with a large army on my part could save the eventuality, and for that reason I started just on receipt of this information!"

"How did you know that she was not telling an untruth?"

"She showed me a ring on which your name was inscribed and told me that she was sent to me by your friends."

The mention of the above occurrence brought to the Prince's recollection that one day he most caressingly, as a token of affection, put on the finger of Lulia, that diamond ring;—at that time they were coming towards this direction under the disguise of *Sannyashi*. Hamida was present there, she took away that ring from the hand of Lulia, saying that, "This ring is dangerous, it would surely expose us on our journey and our arrest was certain, inspite of our best efforts." The Prince now fully realized the necessity which moved Hamid

to take that course, otherwise the Prince would have been taken a prisoner to Agra by this time."

Khurum continued, "Yes, I beg to tell you that the friends to whose unbounded kindness and wisdom, our safe arrival to this place is due, thoroughly know this Gangia, rather she was the trusted confidant of theirs, and I quite see that but for her timely information, I would have been arrested and taken a prisoner to Agra. Where is Gangia now?"

Maharana rejoined, "I don't know that, noble Prince. She left us just after giving the information, and at the time of her departure she handed over to me a letter with a request to make that over to you."

The Maharana called his valet to the place and asked him to send the chief officer of the state to see him. The officer came and the Rana asked him to bring the above-mentioned letter of Shahazada, with the safe keeping of which he was entrusted. The officer obeyed the order, and placed the letter in the hands of the Prince with due respect and formality, who with a palpitating heart and extreme curiosity and eagerness opened the letter when the following lines first caught his eyes——

"Oh noble Prince, pray, read this letter when you are alone, and keep the contents of it a solemn secret. Pray, keep the history of my darling, Lalita, (Lulia) a secret to you,—our past history should be a sealed book to the world. Our very existence has been blotted out of the face of the earth, -a veil of oblivion has been cast

over it,—when asked please say that Lulia is the daughter of a Persian Mahamedan, or at all events give her a Mahamedan origin, by no means it be told that she is our daughter. My point is that give the world to know your Begum is of Mahamedan extraction, I leave the details to you to manage.”

The countenance of the Prince assumed an unwonted gravity ;—he kept the letter within the fold of his dress with so much care and attention, as if it was the most sacred thing upon earth. Karna Singh cast a searching look upon his face and asked, “May I enquire any thing about this letter ? From whom this missive is sent ?”

Shahazada seemed to have been startled as if he had risen from a stupor, and eagerly replied, “Oh, yes, certainly, I can have no secret from you. Those who saved me from the hand of Nurjahan, I mean from the diabolical conspiracy she planned for my capture, this letter comes from them.”

“May I ask who they are ?”

“I pray to be pardoned, dear friend, on that score, I am not authorised to divulge the names, I have been strictly enjoined upon.”

“A Hindu or a Musalman ?”

“Both, I might say”—then the Prince smilingly added, “Exactly like my humble self, my mother was a Hindu, but by religion, I am a mahamedan, I presume this is also the case with Mahabat Khan.”

Maharana with apparently cheerful countenance

said, "Badsha Begum Nurjahan will be anxious to punish them, I mean the earthly saviour of your life. I regard it our sacred duty to save them."

The Prince's countenance beamed with a smile, and he remarked, "I quite admit that queen Nurjahan is an extraordinarily shrewd woman, but she too believes that there is one who now outshines her in the brilliancy of her intellect; you may rest assured that Nurjahan won't be able to do any harm to them, moreover, they have by now gone far way off;—their main object was to help us to reach your place, under your protection, as soon as their object was fulfilled, they left us and have gone to a distant country.

Maharana said, "Then we need not be anxious on their account."

"No, not in the least."

"Sanazada, taking advantage of a dear friend, I take the liberty of asking you a questson, to satisfy my curiosity, I hope you will not take umbrage."

"Maharana, I am a plain man, I hope you will save me from this sort of formality, the very tone of request puts me to a sense of shame."

"It is indeed against the rules of common etiquette to make any enquiries about one's wife, but in this case, in the matter of one who is going to be the Empress of India, it is entirely different. Every body will be anxious to know the particulars about the partner of your noble life;—they will tease me out of my life by questioning as to who is the father of this fortunate

lady who now shines as the brightest jewel of a woman by your side,—”

The Prince interrupting said, “Maharana—I must not make a secret of it to you ! You may rest assured, that the woman whom I have taken as my wife is of respectable parentage.” The Maharana most eagerly rejoined, “I know that, there cannot be any doubt as to that, such noble, queenly figure, such a goddess-like appearance is not to be seen in an ordinary family ! My curiosity is to know the country and the family which she most gloriously immortalizes.”

The Prince’s countenance assumed a hesitating appearance, he was not accustomed to tell a lie, unconsciously his face assumed a red pallor, he slowly and in a low undertone began, “The father of my beloved wife is a very respectable inhabitant of Persia ;—he came to the Mogul Court, along with others to secure a high place there. He concealed me in different places to save me from the rancourous, devouring anger of Nurjahan ;—pray, know this much that I love my wife Lulia with the ardour and impetuosity of a passionate lover, and for this reason I married her ; even without waiting for the permission of my father. I may tell you further that god be willing, she will one day shine as the brightest jewel in the Zenana of the Moguls, the Taj Mahal, and under that name she will be the Empress of India ! I hope it will satisfy you.”

Karna Singh’s face assumed a very grave appearance, rather unkindfully he muttered out “No.”

For a long time they remained silent, so after a long pause Maharana asked all on a sudden, "When I arrived at this place, I heard that the name of the Emperor Sahajahan was cheered up, his glory was sung in thousand voices, but to my utter astonishment I found you alone ! How is that ?"

The Prince smiled and said, "Maharana, he is a great ventriloquist, he is really a wonderful man, he can sing in thousand voices, he sang the song of Shahjahan's glory."

"Where is he now ?"

"I was just searching him, but I could not get a clue of him, I am a little bit anxious on his account, but I am sure, he will sometime appear at Udaypur."

From the manner of delivery, the Maharana could easily see that the Shahazada was concealing something, in fact that he was not making a clean breast of everything was apparent from the very attitude of the Prince ;—for that reason he did not trouble the Shahazada with any further question,—but got up and made himself ready for journey to Mewar. Shahazada also got up and started for the place where Lulia was most anxiously waiting for him. To-day after their first interview Prince Khurum was absent from Lulia, the angel of his soul, for such length of time. How painful was the separation ! In all important affairs of the states, love must play a subordinate part. It was the first painful experience of the Prince.

CHAPTER XXX

LULIA BEGUM

Every student of history is familiar with the details of the life of Pratap Singh of Marwar. He was a great warrior, a general of undisputed caliber, and found ineffable joy in martial glory. His soul was quite a stranger to luxuries and pleasures of this world. But his son was entirely of different mould. He was given to all sorts of frivolities and voluptuous pleasures of this world. He was luxurious to the extreme and full of vanity. He built the city of Udaypur at a very fabulous expense, in fact, he spent huge and stupendous sum towards the beautification of this city. The famous marble-built mansion of Udaypur was almost a store house of all the luxurious furniture that was then invented. In fact, in point of luxury and brilliant decoration it could stand a fair comparison with the magnificent Mogul Court of Agra. He was not in need of money. We may have some idea of the riches from a reference to the memoirs of Jahangir, who made a magnificent present to his son Karna Singh. Jahangir wrote, "Karna Singh was a guest in my court for nearly a month, within that short time, I made him a magnificent present, the value of which must exceed ten

lacs of rupees. Moreover, I gave him more than hundred chosen horses, and five elephants of the highest value."

Prince Khurum and Lulia are now the guest of this Karna Singh, and it is no wonder such luxury-loving Prince would not spare any effort and money to give the guests a reception worthy of their position, in fact, Lulia was given the splendour and luxuries of a Badsha Begum! Lulia is now surrounded with a number of ladies in waiting, who were anxious to obey her least command, they considered themselves happy to be able to act up to her single wish;—ladies of rank served as her maids of honour. Two maid-servants with gold handled fans were fanning the simple-minded girl Lulia, and others were anxious to wipe off the small particles of sweat that appeared on her brow! She was dressed with all the luxuries of the age, to which this simple child of nature was a stranger. In fact, she was seated like a doll bedecked with jewelleries and pearls of the greatest value! But Lulia was not happy, the natural mirth of her soul seemed to have gone!

Indeed, she was not at all happy in her new life,—an ordinary reader of human mind could not fail to detect the indelible stamp of melancholy upon that celestial brow! She was a child of nature and from her infancy she was accustomed to a different sort of life. The separation from Khurum preyed hard upon her mind. She loved solitude;—she was brought up in the solitude of the deserted city of Eatepur Sikri, under

the guidance of her affectionate old grand-father, and lovely care of Hamida and Mahammad Jan who loved her as one dearer than life ! The condition of her mind can be better imagined than described !

Just at this time, a maid-servant entered appearance and made a low bow and informed that Shahazada was coming !

Lulia like a jolly dove jumped off and entirely forgetting her position, the common etiquette due to her station in life, she fell into the feet of the Prince and with eyes brimful of tears asked in a plaintive voice, "Dearest Lord of my life, what is all this pomp and show ?"

The Prince strained her to his bosom, the female attendants retired. The Shahazada was deeply moved and touched by the spectacle of his dear wife in that miserable plight ; with much excitement he exclaimed "What ails you, Lulia, my darling ?" Kissing all the time the coral lips of the girl !

Lulia in her natural musical tone said, "My Love, I don't like this pomp and show, I can't bear this gorgeous, luxurious dress—what is all this for ? If am deprived of the privilege of seeing you every now and then according to my liking, what is the good of this existence ? All the luxuries of the world would not give me a moment's peace, if I can not see you always."

The Shahazada with affectionate careasing made Lulia sit by his side, and in a musing tone assured her,

"Most adorable queen, I do equally feel the pangs of separation, in two days' time we shall be in Marwar, and there we hope to be together day and night."

Lulia cast her beautiful eyes, full of tears and expressive of deep anxiety and muttered in a tremulous voice, "I am afraid the exalted position of a Badsha Begum won't make me happy!"

The Prince with extreme eagerness interrogated, "Why my Love, why?"

Lulia rejoined, "I am afraid the gorgeous splendour of that high life won't make me happy."

A carnation glow suffused over the countenance of the Prince and he imprinted most ardent passionate kisses on the coral lips of Lulia and then said, "Lulia, I shall keep you in a style thousand times more gorgeous and splendid these Rajputs could conceive of! What do these mountainous Rajputs know of luxury and splendour?" Lulia in a melancholy voice replied, "I shall be more unhappy then, my Lord!"

The Prince again kissing those red lips smiling said, "Lulia, my angel, you don't want what the soul of the best women in the world panteth after;—Nurjahan moved heaven and earth to attain to the position which she then attained; you don't want to be the Empress of India?"

Lulia nodded her head in the negative, to which Khurum said, "Lulia, for your sake, I can for ever dismiss from my mind the hope of one day becoming the

ruler of India, I mean if it fails to satisfy you, my angel, what is the use?"

Lulia most eagerly interrupting ejaculated, "No, no, my Lord, don't want that, my soul is not tainted with that amount of selfishness, why for my sake you would forego that highest honour? I shall be happy with you, in any position, provided I am not deprived of seeing you always."

The Prince most enthusiastically said, "I shall collect all the treasures of the world for your sake, Lulia, I must make you happy."

The youthful girl's voice was choked with deep emotions, and in a broken, tremulous voice she said, "I shall consider myself the happiest creature on earth, if I can see you occasionally, at my seeking, I don't want more."

The Prince in an assuring tone said, "I am not going to be the Emperor very soon, I hope by the grace of the Almighty, my father would live another hundred years more, and so, I shall not be engaged in state affairs, and we shall be able to pass days and nights together."

Lulia's countenance glowed with a radiant smile and she said, "It is enough for me."

The Shahazada said, "I have got a letter from your mother!"

Lulia most eagerly ejaculated, "Who gave? When?"

Khurum said, "Gangia gave the information of our danger to the Maharana, and that saves us from

the danger of immediate arrest, I shudder to think of our fate, if Gangia would not have given the Maharana this timely information, the Maharana came to our rescue as soon as he received the news."

"Is Gangia come?"

"No—she had gone to the Maharana of Udaypur."

"Whence then?"

"The Maharana cannot enlighten on the point ;—he does not know anything."

"Letter——"

"She left the letter with the Maharana."

"My mother's letter?" she asked interrogatively.

"Yes,—it is from your mother!"

"Is it addressed to me?"

"No, to me!"

"What does it contain?"

"Just read it, please" so saying Khurum made over the letter to Lulia who read over the few lines written at the top of the letter again and again, she then cast a longing, enquiring look upon the face of the Prince. Shahazada said, "I don't know, Lulia, what is the object of this request, but ere long, I decided to proclaim to the world the glorious history of your father, but now I am helpless. I am unable to show any disrespect to their request."

Lulia in a grave voice said, "How do you then explain my position and parentage to the world?"

"I have already given your parentage, and particulars, the Maharana made enquiries about it."

"Pray, tell me, how did you put it?"

"I told them that you are the daughter of a respectable Mahomedan of Persia?"

Lulia laughingly said, "Oh! what a sham life this Badsha Begum is so to like—how painful it is! I was under the impression that only the poor have had to recourse to falsehood, but it is strange that even the Emperors are not exempted from it!"

"Why—why Lulia?"

"My Lord, you are giving a false description, a false character or rather parentage to your wife."

"It is also politics, a political move, my Lulia!"

"I worship the goddess politics for your sake, then, I am now known to be the daughter of a Persian, a Persian flower imported to India."

Khurum smiling said, "No, my dearest, you are the brightest flower of this world!"

Lulia's radiant face went crimson, with a sense of modesty and humility and in a rather serious tone said, "Dearest Prince, I am much concerned about that, I have heard that the Persian ladies are the fairest and most handsome women in the world, how can the people be led to believe, if you give me such an origin?"

"Lulia, the whole Persian beauties put together can not, dare not vie with the charm which a single finger of your noble feet possesses!"

"That is due to your excess of love for this humble creature, who is unworthy to kiss the dust of your feet!"

"No, Lulia, I am not altogether blinded by the sentiments of love. I speak the plain truth. You may not know that in our Begum Mahal, the chosen beauties of the world are to be found, but none of them stand a moment's comparison with you !"

"My Love, how grateful am I to you for your kindness, what is your opinion about Nurjahan ?"

"Yes ! I quite admit that Nurjahan is extraordinarily handsome, a unique beauty, she possesses ravishing charm, but she too, is devoid of that amiability and peaceful and dignified charm which your heavenly face indicates ! I had never been to Bengal before, but if all the Bengali ladies are possessed of such serene, unspeakable charm, then, I am bound to say that as regards beauty, the Bengali ladies are unrivalled, matchless !"

In a tone indicative of deep pathos, Lulia said, "I left my native land Bengal in my infancy, I have not the faintest recollection of it ! Yes, my Lord, you were right when you said that I am neither a Bengali nor a Mahamedan. I have been an out and out Mahamedan for a long time, I can speak fluently and without a mistake pure Persian !"

The Prince dragged her close to his bosom and kissing said, "My dearest adorable queen, you are the brightest jewel that has ever shone upon this earth !"

There was a pause for some time, after which Lulia raised her head from the bosom of the Shahazada and

said interrogatively, "You have no fear now from any quarter?"

Khurum assured her saying that, "The whole of Rajwara would fight for me, they are determined to save me even at the expense of their life!"

"If the Emperor himself comes to fight, I am afraid——"

"I presume, he won't"

"Nurjahan?"

"Nurjahan is a very intelligent woman,—she is credited with good common sense, she will be the last person to encourage the king to such a course."

"Then, everything is safe, I hope?"

"Not in the least, but my heart pains me to think that I could not make you the Empress of India!"

"Dearest Lord of my soul, if I can establish an Empire over the dominion of your soul, what little I care for the whole world?"

"You are an invaluable gem, the brightest that has ever adorned the world."

CHAPTER XXXI

JULEKHA'S LETTER.

Lulia extricating herself from the lovely embrace of the Prince, raised herself, sat erect and said, "Let me read this letter."

Khurum said, "Yes, read it Lulia, I have brought it for you, I want you to read it."

Lulia began to read the letter as follows ;——

"Shahazada,——

I have spoken to you much about ourselves, but I have not yet given you the complete story of our life, hence this letter will serve as a complement. By the time this epistle would reach you, I am sure you will have a safe home in Udaypur by the grace of God,—for I am sure that Behari Charan and Dulali would be enough to save you from any danger on your way, no enemy will be able to touch a single hair of your head.

I have already related to you about my strong resolve, the most solemn vow I took, the one ruling ambition of my life ;—now I have by the grace of the Almighty attained that object,—my Lulia is now a *Badsha Begum*,—I am confident that my Nurjahan will very soon shine as a second Nurjahan, and enhance the glory of the throne of Delhi.

Perhaps you have now understood that Gangia and Hamida are the same person, and is none else than the *Daima* of my Lulia. She used to keep the betel-shop at Agra, and occasionally used to visit Lulia at Fathpur Sikri ! If you bestow a little thought over the matter, my object will be apparent to you. It was absolutely necessary for the attainment of my aim to keep a sharp witted, intelligent person outside the sphere of the Royal Court to acquaint myself with the details of what was passing throughout the kingdom ; and Hamida just answered my purpose. You must have observed how intelligent a woman she is, full of resources and wonderful presence of mind. Under my instructions, she kept that shop in the Chakbazar of Agra. I could easily move about with the help of that ring on which the name of Nurjahan was inscribed, and as necessity arose I could meet with Gangia at my pleasure, but in case of urgency, when I could not leave the presence of Nurjahan, Dulali served me as a faithful agent. You must have some experiences of the wonderful power of Behari Charan, who was my right hand man in all my movements and whose devotion and faithfulness to me were simply unsurpassed. Behari Charan is none else than Mahammad Jan, and the Maulavi of Fatepur Sikri !

It is needless to tell you that Behari Charan so successfully frightened Ajit Singh and the King by producing ghostly scenes. You have also seen the wonderful capacity of Dulali, who is more brisk and agile than a monkey ; she could open any window, any door so

slyly and cunningly that no precaution on the part of the inmates of the house could prevent it,—I may remind you that the terrible, blood-curdling ghostly scene, which so utterly stupefied and amazed Raghubi Singh in the downstairs in the Marium Begum's Palace in Fatepur Sikri was so successfully exhibited by Dulali !

In the upper story of that Palace, the amazingly horrible scene which so terrified Ajit Singh and the Emperor himself needs no detailed description at my hands for one of these dreadful exhibitions you were yourself present, along with Lulia, Dulali and Behari Charan !—You remember how successfully it was done !

When the above scene was produced, there was quite a sensation, almost a consternation in the minds of the people regarding the murder-affairs of Delhi, and this soul-killing scene was produced by Behari Charan with a definite aim, which was so successfully attained ! You are fully familiar with, and I need not dilate upon it at length. I have not yet been able to ascertain the cause of the mysterious appearance of the dead bodies at the main entrance-gate of Delhi, but I am sure that rogue Gaharjan must have hand in it. Behari Charan has now applied himself to the unravelling of this mystery, and I am confident very soon truth will come to light.

I do not know much about this Gaharjan, that he is a veritable scoundrel I have no doubt ;—of all persons in the Begum Mahal, this infernal creature was

the only person who could suspect my movements, and everything regarding myself was communicated to Nurjahan by this Gaharjan. I am sure the rogue will meet with due punishment at no distant date !

I am not very much for spreading the calumny of the zenana of the Mogul Emperors, but my letter will not be complete without some description of it. In the Begum Mahal nearly five thousand creatures of the weaker sex reside, from the Empress to the meanest maid servant. It is not likely, and you can not expect that all of them should live a chaste and pure life ; they cannot be so many heavenly beings devoid of the grosser passions of this world of ours ! But you know that the entrance of a male human being is strictly prohibited, and Mashru was to keep a strict watch over the movements of the miserable inmates of this mysterious abode, and it is very likely that Mashru's connivance was purchased at a very high price. But to detect the amorous misdeeds of the inmates of the Begum Mahal, Mashru has engaged a young man by the name of Gaharjan, who moved in the Begum Mahal under the garb of a woman. He kept a strict watch upon my movements, but I could not understand it before, otherwise, I could have provided against it sufficiently.

All on a sudden I came to know that the shrewd queen Nurjahan began to entertain suspicion against my conduct ; not only that, I also learnt to my utter amazement that the Emperor himself had shaken off

his lethargic and pleasure-loving habits and began to suspect me. One day he by means of some wonderful contrivance quite out-witted me and brought me to *Shis Mahal* in a very secret place which was not known to me, although I was an inmate of that place for nearly ten years ! You may learn the particulars of that private interview from Behari Charan. I was lastly taken in a mosque, and when I came out of it, I saw the Emperor who all along had talked with me under the cover of a mask !

That very day I fully realized that my tenure of life in the Begum Mahal was about to be over ;—there was no doubt in my mind that the strong-willed Nurjahan would not hesitate a moment to take my life ! But I was by the grace of God prepared for it ;—after careful efforts, I got a sort of poison from a religious mendicant, the effect of which was simply wonderful. The consumer of this poison has the immediate and exact appearance of a dead man, although the spark of vital power is not entirely extinguished in the body. I kept that poison always with me. That very day I sent information through Gangia to Behari Charan, who remained at the gate of the fort as a guard. I have made a careful study of character of Nurjahan, whose love for me was sincere, and I was confident that my death-bed request to her would not go unattended, and accordingly I prayed that my corpse might be disposed of in a Hindu mode, that is, by burning instead of burying. The prayer was sanctioned, and my apparently

dead body was sent outside for cremation. You will learn the further details on this point from Behari Charan.

The effect of the above mentioned poison lasts for three days upon the body of the consumer, and as much for three days, I was to all intents and purposes a dead human being! Behari Charan and Gangia kept my dead body in a deserted temple, where by the careful nursing of Dulali, Gangia and Behari, I got life again! I presume you remember what took place afterwards!

Perhaps, I shall not have the good fortune to see you again. But if I remain alive, if my life exists, I shall see you the day you assume the imperial sovereignty. Pray, give Lulia, every possible comfort, you know what an object of love and affection to me that unique creature of nature. She is dearer to me than my own life! Noble Prince, make her happy! We all sincerely wish and pray to the Almighty for your happiness and prosperity, and we are sure that by the grace of God, the whole country will be redolent of your fame, and you will leave a name behind you, which the hostility will cherish, and in the world beyond this mortal life, you will enjoy peace and eternal happiness!

I have one more request to make;—I am deeply attached to Dulali, I love her as my daughter! Behari Charan would come back after your safe arrival at Udaypur, but whenever opportunity offers itself I shall send Dulali to you, to your loving care and patronage

She is unmarried, give her a husband who can make her happy.

I have finished. Again our sincere prayer will go forth to heaven, to the Almighty, the Giver of all goods, Who will show His choicest blessings upon you and my Lulia to whom her grandfather conveys his sincere love.

Mother

Sarba Mangala Bhairabi

For some time both of them remained silent;— Lulia first broke the silence and said, "I now quite see the cause of Behari Dada's sudden disappearance, He is now engaged in making enquiries about the murder-affairs of Delhi, and to teach a lesson to this Gaharjan."

"What connection have we with that murder-affair?" rejoined the Prince.

"Perhaps there is some, we don't know," replied Lulia.

Khurum in a rather grave tone spoke out, "Yes, it is likely, human life is full of mysteries, particularly the Mogul Court is abode of those mysteries and curiosities. However, I shall make every possible search for the discovery of Behari Charan and Dulali. I am indeed grateful to them. I, for the life of me, fail to account for their sudden disappearance; my mind sometimes is filled with a sense of horror that it is not impossible for the infernal rogue Gaharjan to murder them both!

A sense of ineffable fear seized upon the countenance of Lulia, and her white face assumed a deadly pallor and she ejaculated, "Oh ! I am undone then ! If my Behari Dada is dead, my heart will never enjoy peace, oh, how deeply he loved me !"

"I shall move heaven and earth to find them out, Lulia. If Gaharjan has perpetrated the diabolical act which I shudder to think, he will receive condign punishment at my hands."

"Pray, find them out, by all means, my Lord."

"Let me go now, and make a request to the Maharana again"

"Certainly they can not be dissolved like vapour into thin air ;—they must have been somewhere near."

"Yes, I am just going, my Lulia, compose yourself. dispel all doubts from your mind."

Again a very vigilant and careful search for the discovery of the two persons was instituted by the Maharana, but no clue as to their whereabouts was obtained.

CHAPTER XXXII.

JAHANGIR AND NURJAHAN

Prince Shahazada with all the pomp and ceremony due to his position was safely brought to Udaypur. There a magnificent mansion fitted up to the most luxurious style in the midst of that picturesquely beautiful lake was set apart for the residence of the Prince and his beloved consort. A student of history is presumed to know the length of time the happy pair was passing in that historic hall.

In due course this information was communicated to the Emperor. The Maharana himself sent this information to the king. A beautifully written letter in well-chosen language over the signatures of the Maharana himself and Gaja Singh, the Prince of Marwar, and Bhim Singh, the Prince of Ambar, and the other chiefs of Rajputana, containing a detailed account of the events was sent to Jahangir, who with extreme curiosity read the contents of the famous epistle, and on its completion an unconscious smile played upon his countenance. He, thereupon issued an immediate order for the dissolution of the camp and to direct their steps towards Agra.

The Emperor was not at all well disposed towards Mahabat Khan and he was determined to teach a good

lesson to that refractory General. Hearing that Mahabat Khan had already started for Delhi, he made up his mind to pass the summer in Kashmir after inflicting due punishment upon him. But he had now to change his programme. The Emperor now received a correct information about the fate of his son Parbesh, so he was inwardly pleased to read the contents of the letter from which he learnt that Prince Khurum was alive, and was happily living in the camp of the Rajputs as their guest. He now withdrew the proclamation setting upon a high price upon the capture of his son Khurum. The king now sent his valet with a letter to the address of Nurjahan asking her to come to his camp at once.

A little while after, the queen Nurjahan with her matchless beauty fully displayed appeared before the king, and made due obeisance. Jahangir asked the Empress to sit down and handed over the letter above mentioned to her only with the remark, "Read on Please." Nurjahan without any reply went on reading the letter with extreme curiosity and heated breath, and at the completion of her reading, she with a very grave face said, "My noble Lord, do you believe what these Rajputs say?"

Jahangir in a firm voice answered, "Why not? Certainly I do every word of it, I know that Rajput's word is inviolable."

"But I shall be happy if during the life-time of your Majesty, no unusual disturbance happens."

The King in an equally firm voice replied, "No, my

queen, I don't expect any disturbance from that quarter, I am sure Khurum and the Rajputs won't disturb me in *my life time*, but,—"

"What do you mean by this "but," Jahapana?"

Jahangir with a forced and affected smile said, "Nur-Jahan, I am afraid of you only."

Nurjahan's countenance suddenly flashed with an indignant rage, both her eyes assumed an unwonted pallor, as if they were swimming in tears, and in a voice almost choked with emotions, she said, "Jahapana, do you still entertain any doubt as to the genuineness and sincerity of my love?"

Jahangir in a clear voice of unmistakable firmness said in reply, "I don't doubt your love, I never doubted it, and my sweet Nuri, I assure you, I shall never doubt it;—but is it not natural that you are more favourably inclined towards Shariyer, your son-in-law, than my other sons? Are you not——"

Nurjahan with eagerness interrupting ejaculated, "Noblest king, dearest Lord of my life, pray, believe this humblest *Bandi*, I swear by the name of anything holy, that during your life time, I shall not make any attempt to place Shariyer on the throne."

"But after my death?"

"Jahapana; I must not have any secret which I can not confide to you, I very much like to die as an Empress during your life-time, but if my fate has been otherwise ordained,—if I be not so fortunate, i.e, if I am

to outlive your Majesty, I must make an attempt to place your son Shariyer on the throne."

"Why so my dearest queen?—Shariyer has got his elder brothers still alive,—are they not entitled to the throne both by law and equity after my demise?"

"I quite admit the reasonableness of your argument,—but I may be permitted to observe that with the accession of Khurum to the throne of Delhi, the Mogul Empire will come to an end, I mean it will be practically a Rajput kingdom."

"May I tell you in reply that the great Mogul Empire was consolidated by my great father, mainly with the help of Rajput arms, the position, I may say the very existence of the Empire was due to the ungrudging support of the Rajputs."

"I again admit the force of your reasoning;—but so long the Rajputs were like so many servants attached to the Empire, they never attempted to assert their supremacy, but in the event of Khurum gaining the throne the Rajputs will be masters of the situation, and they will guide the Empire, and Khurum will be a mere tool in their hands."

Jahangir simpered and observed, "Let that matter drop now, I am not at present very much concerned with the future position of the Mogul Empire, I don't like to bother my head about that,—let me ask you one question more."

"What's that, pray?"

"Please enlighten me on the mysterious death of my poor son Parbesh; who assassinated him?"

Like an infuriated snake just trampled under, Nurjahan raised her head and cast a steadfast glance upon the face of the king, who all along was surveying the superbly beautiful figure of the queen with the keenest minuteness.

For a pretty long time, Nurjahan remained silent, in the excess of her feelings, her utterance failed her, then in a clear voice of more than usual loudness she exclaimed, "Am I to understand that your suspicion falls on me as the perpetrator of this foul deed?"

Jahangir slowly, but firmly replied, "No, I don't think that I can be so mean, I know you are incapable of such a horrible deed. I have learnt from enquiry that Parbesh was passing his time in merry making and revelry with a number of lascivious women in his camp,—at this time the Mogul soldiers, not finding the Prince got disheartened and dispersed, and those licentious women also ran in different directions, but I am credibly informed that one of the harlots did not leave him, do you know who this woman? Can you throw any light on the point?"

The Emperor cast a searching glance upon the countenance of Nurjahan in order to study her mind if she was concealing any thing;—Nurjahan lowered her voice and said, "I am sorry I can not enlighten your Majesty on the point, I do not know much more, I have also made enquiries;—very probably that woman must

have mixed up poison with the wine which the Shaha-zada took,"

"Yes, the doctors are also of the same opinion, they also after the post mortem examination of the Shaha-zada's body came to the same conclusion."

Nurjahan added, "I have made all possible enquiries but I am sorry, I am not a whit wiser yet, but still the investigation is being most diligently continued."

"I presume the woman is not sent by Shariyer, he certainly can not be privy to this foul conspiracy" said the king interrogatively.

"No, no, certainly not, it is impossible" eagerly ejaculated the queen."

"And not a creature of Shahazadi, your daughter" demanded the king in a faltering tone.

Nurjahan's face went crimson with rage in a rather indignant tone she cried out, "What does your Majesty think? I am sorry your Majesty can go to such a length."

"Let it drop now, I don't like to bother myself any more with that, what is done can not be undone! I know Parbesh had many enemies among the weaker sex, for I know that young libertine had violated the chastity of many a fair girl and ladies! It is very likely that some one among them has poisoned him as an act of vengeance! I have got a letter for you.

"A letter for me, my Lord?" demanded the queen inquisitively.

"Yes, there is nothing to be wondered at?"

"It has been sent to your Majesty?"

"Yes, the letter has been addressed to me, but I am requested to show you its content."

The queen seemed to have been almost consumed by a sense of curiosity, with extreme wonder she cast an amazing look upon the face of the king—the Emperor handed over a letter to her, and the queen on opening it, with indescribable curiosity and eagerness ejaculated, "Julekha! Julekha is not dead!"—her countenance became lighted up with an animation that gave her the aspect of an avenging goddess!

The Emperor smiled and said, "No, my queen, she is not dead, she is as alive as you and I; it is quite creditable on her part that she succeeded in throwing dust into your eyes, indeed, it puzzles me to think that she could steal a march upon so extraordinary and gifted a queen as you are?"

Nurjahan without paying much attention to the king's observation eagerly and voraciously began to read the letter. Julekha writes,—

"Jahapana,—

I venture to address this letter to your Majesty. I was the favourite abigail of the queen Nurjahan, your Majesty knows that, but the history of this unfortunate woman's life is shrouded in a mystery, and none but the Badsha Begum knows something about it! As I am going to leave this mundane world of ours, full of sorrows, misfortunes and anxieties, my mind prompts me to acquaint your Majesty with the mysterious

history of this unfortunate woman, I must be brief; I must not take too much of your Majesty's valuable time.

Sher Afgan slew my husband, and took me as a Bandi to his wife Meherunessa!—my old father-in-law was forced to embrace the Moslem faith and being excommunicated from the society, he was obliged to leave his native land with my little daughter in his bosom. He had with him Behari Charan as sarvant and one woman known as *Shamar ma* as maid servant, who also brought up my little daughter with more care and attention than I could have bestowed!

Sher Afgan received condign punishment at your hands and God has meted out proper justice in this case. For he slew my husband and snatched me from his bosom, so you murdered him and took his wife to your bed! Since then I had been living in the Begum Mahal as the favourite abigail of your queen! Though to all appearances, I seemed to have been highly gratified at my new position, still there was lurking in my bosom, the rancourous recollection of those terrible days, and I took a solemn vow by the name of every thing holy and sacred to take revenge upon the most grievous wrong perpetrated upon me!—indeed, since that day it was the ruling passion of my mind, it was the sole ambition of my life to satisfy the feeling of vengeance, I so affectionately cherished in my mind and every thing I did, every movement of mine pointed irresistibly to that one end!—my ambition took a definite

shape. I formed a firm resolution to make my daughter the Empress of India, and to whom the proud head of Nurjahan would bow down!

I have now fulfilled the solemn vow I took,—the ambition of my life has been realized!—now my daughter has been wedded to Shahazada Khurum in the solemn ceremony of marriage;—after your Majesty's demise, Prince Khurum will ascend the throne of Delhi under the name of Shajahan!—and my daughter's name will be known throughout the world as Mam Taj Mahal. I am sure her name will be sung in praise more enthusiastically and eloquently than the name of Nurjahan!

I need not trouble you with a long story, but I ought to clear your mind of certain doubts as to some recent occurrences!—my old father-in-law lived for a long time at Eatepur Sikri under the assumed name of Salabat Khan. I may also tell you that his old servant and maid servant passed under the name of Mahammad Jan and Hamida, and my little daughter was brought up by them, and at Eatepur Sikri, she was married to the Shahazada! During the late visit of your Majesty of the deserted city of Eatepur, the Shahazada was also there, although your Majesty saw him there, but could not recognize him! I may be permitted to remind you that when the horrible scene was exhibited before your Majesty in the night in the Palace of Marium Begum, Prince Khurum was present there as one of the actors of that blood-curdling scene!

Report has reached me to the effect that your Majesty has been determined upon the destruction of the city by levelling it to the ground ! I pray your Majesty to desist from such a resolution ! The story of ghosts and goblins is a myth ! Our servant Behari Charan has the wonderful power of a mimic and a ventriloquist ; the amazingly horrible scenes that were produced before your Majesty and Ajit Singh, were the doings of this half educated Behari Charan !

I pray that your Majesty may be pleased to show this letter to Badsha Begum. I quite feel how dearly she loved me !—it is more than what a sister can claim ;—but I was never disposed to cause any harm to her ;—whatever I did,—my every move, even the very breath I took pointed irresistibly to that one aim, namely, to make my daughter a second Nurjahan ;—your Majesty may kindly tell the queen that my daughter will be the last person to think of any evil to the Badsha Begum, rather she will be glad to serve the queen as her mother. Noble king !—every mother is proud to speak highly of her daughter, but allow me to say that my Lulia—such is the name of my daughter—is incapable of thinking of any evil to any human being, and I am sure Nurjahan will also feel inclined to love her as a daughter ! Pray tell her to pardon this unfortunate woman—this homeless, houseless—this friendless, outcast miserable woman, all her frailties, and weaknesses if ever they have offended the good and noble queen !

One word more—there is living in the Begum Mahal a man known by the name of Gaharjañ. He has been living there for a long time, In fact he is a male person but he lives in your zenena in the garb of a woman. I may tell your Majesty that the mysterious murder-affair of Delhi will not be stopped unless this false scoundrel of a man be properly punished. Moreover, the calumny of the Begum Mahal will go on spreading unless it is immediately put a stop to!

My daughter, I might tell for the information of your Majesty, is not anxious to become the Empress at once. With a sincere prayer to the Almighty for your Majesty's long life and happiness, I remain,

Your Majesty's most obedient and unfortunate
Bandi Julekha,

On the completion of the roading of the letter, Nurjahan stopped, and for a time perfect silence reigned in the camp hall. After a while Jahangir smilingly asked the queen interrogatively, "You pardon her, my queen?"

Nurjahan in a half audible plaintive tone replied, "Yes, I say by the name of god that I pardon Julekha, once my favourite abigail, with all my heart."

"Yes, you have done Just like a queen, you ought to pardon her."

CHAPTER XXXIII.

DANGER OF BEHARI CHARAN

There was good deal of reason why Behari Charan and Dulali were not found even after a careful search. When the Rajput soldiers were rending the sky with their cries of victory in their accustomed, national way Behari Charan was keeping a sharp eye over the movements of the mounted Fakir. He found that all of a sudden, the Fakir jumped down from his horse and ran on in the mountainous country, following the mountainous track—as fast as he could—the horse on which the Fakir was riding fell down from the mountainous precipice while running away being afraid of his life, rather being startled by the sound of the hoofs of several horses at his back!

Behari Charan began to entertain suspicion about the identity, the genuineness of this Fakir, whoever he might be, Behari was determined not to let him go away without ascertaining the motives which brought him there and accordingly he followed him with all possible haste, so he could not make time to speak any thing either to the Shahazada or to Lulia!

Behari Charan could not at first ascertain the direction the Fakir followed in, the rugged mountainous track was not very convenient for a quick march or hurried journey, and he thought that it was

not unlikely that the Fakir had concealed himself in the bushes close by, for it was most convenient for that purpose!

Behari Charan knew that the Fakir was not out of sight for a long time, so he was confident of overtaking the Fakir at a very short time, and with that object in view he very carefully and cautiously proceeded! He concentrated all his attention to the strengthening of his auricular power, and stopped almost at every step to hear any possible sound from any quarter. Our readers must have seen how keen was his power of hearing!

As Behari Charan slowly proceeded, he thought within himself "Dulali must have been following me;—otherwise, she can not be dissolved into thin air, she must be moving unseen by any body else! There is no reason for her flying away now!—the direction which the Fakir followed was rather lonely, unfrequented by any human being—but on the opposite side, the people of the neighbouring villages assembled, and the mountainous valley below was full of Rajput soldiers! Behari Charan got up to the top of a mountain or rather a hill and found that Mahammad Toki was going at a great distance with his army;—they looked like so many dots in a map!

All of a sudden Behari Charan stopped as if startled by a strange sound!—with great attention he seemed to have heard a sound and quickly but imperceptibly he ran on in the hilly track!—the road was a circuitous,

and zigzag one, and no sooner Behari Charan took a turn, his eyes met with a horrible scene, a blood-curdling scene, and for a time, he stood aghast at the sight, as if he was quite bewildered !

He saw Dulali biting at the feet of the Fakir, at which he was experiencing excruciating pain and sending forth low wailings of woe, which reached the ear of Behari Charan, who following that sound came to the spot to ascertain what it was ! Behari Charan was almost horrified at the sight when he saw that the Fakir brought a small dazzling sword out of his bosom evidently with the intention of murdering Dulali. In the twinkling of an eye Dulali would be no more !—for Dulali could not see what danger was threatening her !—one moment and the terrible sword would fall upon the neck of Dulali ! In a state of bewilderment Behari Charan for a moment stood aghast, but in a trice he recovered himself, and like a wounded lion, he fell upon the Fakir with a terrible force, and caught hold of the hand in which lay that dreadful weapon at which Dulali unloosened her grasp and gave a tremendous push from behind, as a result of which both Behari Charan and the Fakir fell to the ground !

Before they could manage to get up two extraordinarily strong men of Pathan origin fell upon Behari Charan with tremendous force and after gagging, bound him hand and foot !—they then took him on their back and ran away. They, in their hurry could not see Dulali, who like a nimble monkey climbed up a tree

close by,—which act was done most imperceptibly and noiselessly !

Three fast running horses lay concealed in the thick of the forest by the side of the hills. Those dangerous ruffians at once tied light Behari Charan up just with the breast of one of those horses !—they then rode upon the other two horses. The Fakir also accompanied them, but while he was just on the point of riding he, not seeing Dulali there, exclaimed in amazing horror, "Where is that scoundrel of a girl ?"

"No, we did not see her at all" was the joint reply.

The Fakir ejaculated, "Certainly she must be here, my leg has been terribly bitten, it has been profusely bleeding !"

One of them exclaimed, "I am afraid a monkey has done this thing, the place abounds in monkeyes, and it is infested by them."

The Fakir clenched his teeth, his face lighted up with a fiery animation that gave him the aspect of an avenging deity, then indignantly exclaimed, "What nonsense you speak, I have my eyes, I am not devoid of the power of vision !"

The other Pathan in a modest tone said, "Sir, we should not tarry here any longer, there is every chance of our being detected.

The Fakir approvingly said, "You are perfectly right, we must not delay leaving this place any longer."

"To which direction should we move on ?"

"The direction we can safely run without being seen by the Rajputs!"

"Then come this way!"

They then tried to run their horses as fast as they could, but in the hilly tract the horses could not run with their utmost capacity. All the road was full of ups and downs, and there is every probability of a horse slipping down, when trying to force its way up again in the downward journey the chance of a precipitate fall was imminent. So inspite of the strong liking of the Fakir, their journey was a slow one! It gave a special advantage to Dulali. She got down from the tree she was on, and moved towards the place where she kept her clothing! She brought out from the hollow of a tree her dress and putting it on she appeared quite a new creature! She had a horse which she had concealed under the cover of trees;—without such a conveyance as a horse none could travel in that country, particularly when she had to follow Gaharjan. She found the horse gazing, and with her accustomed nimbleness, she got into the horse, and rode on the direction, the Fakir with his followers was going. From the top of the tree, Dulali could clearly observe the way which the Fakir took with his companions; so without much difficulty she followed the Fakir, quite unseen by them!

When the Maharana was deeply engaged in conversation with the Shahazada, the Fakir and his two accomplices had gone a long way with Behari Charan!

Dulali regarded it her solemn duty to follow them, and as a matter of consequence, she could not make time to see Lulia even, and so the simple-minded girl was without any information about Behari Charan or Dulali !

Those three evil-disposed persons rode on without uttering a single word, all the while Behari Charan remained strongly tied up with the belly of the horse, and the condition of his mind and body can be better imagined than described. But there was no other alternative, but to submit to the miserable fate to which he was so ordained !—never in his life he had such painful experience, and no doubt for a time his stout heart gave way to despondency,—but like a flash of lightning it had only a transitory existence in his brave heart, and recovering all his self possession, he said to himself, “I shall teach a lesson to these rogues, by the grace of god !”

Their journey through the desert was about to be over, and green fields of villages greeted their sights, when one of the companions of the Fakir suggested, “Sir, I don't see any use for taking this old man with us ;—we are sorry that our object has been frustrated.”

The Fakir in an angry voice roared, “This old rascal is at the bottom of all.”

“I quite admit it, Sir, but I submit that Badsha Begum does not want this old rogue.”

“You don't understand, man, if we can produce this

old rascal before the queen, she will quite see that we had already overtaken the Shahazada ; and our report will be corroborated by our General Mahammad Toki, who would say that but for the timely help of the Rajputs, Shahazada would have been certainly captured, and in the event of our successfully proving that, we shall not be deprived of the reward promised to us !"

"Yes, Sir, I now quite see the force of your argument, otherwise the Badsha Begum won't believe our report ; this old man will be the passport to our confidence."

"Quite so, for this reason, I am so very anxious to take this old knave with us !—the rogue has fallen into our hands by accident, rather without effort on our part."

"Pray, remember us at the time of the distribution of the reward. Had we not been there, certainly you could not have captured him. Please don't forget our claim, brother."

The other companion of the Fakir was so long silent, so long he did not think it necessary to disturb the conversation, but now he suggested for the first time, "You see, brothers ! we are now passing through villages full of Hindus, if they any how come to know that we have with us a Hindu tied up in this fashion and is being so shabbily treated, they will rise against us and put us to great trouble,"

The Fakir nodded his head and said, "You have just hit upon a right point, I quite see it, just unloosen the

bond, and place him just in front of one of you on the horse back, you must keep a strict eye over the devil, I am confident he will not be able to run away."

"Oh no ! the devil can't run away, but I am afraid, he might cry the people of the village to his help, and put us to great trouble."

"Let us be plain.—we must speak to him point—blank, that in the event of his so doing, we shall kill him and fast ride away."

"All right"

They all stopped their horses, and got down, and as arranged put Behari Charan in front of one of the Pathans ;—poor Behari seemed to have regained his life !

The Fakir with eyes as red as fire, and in thundering voice and indignant tone threatened Behari Charan casting his steadfast gaze upon him, "Rascal, I know you are a villain."

"As your Holiness pleases" replied Behari Charan in a low voice of submissiveness."

"Hold your tongue, nonsense, listen to me and obey it, rascal."

"I pray your Holiness will be pleased to order me according to your sweet desire."

"You my brother-in-law shall have to accompany me to the royal court of Agra."

"I consider it a piece of good fortune, it is a happiness beyond the range of my dream," repeatedly said Behari Charan in reply most enthusiastically."

"My brother-in-law, you will have sweet experiences there, now listen to me what I say."

"Your Holiness may be pleased to order."

"Just sit on a horse in front of this man, mind that you will sit as mute as a dumb person, you must not speak, if you want to speak to any body any thing, then and there you will lose your head."

"Oh Alla save me," ejaculated Behari Charan.

"You infernal wretch, I know you to be a Hindu, why do you crave the help of Alla, which is a Mahamedan mode of invoking the deity," demanded the Fakir interrogatively."

"In time of danger, the name of his God, which lies concealed in his bosom, comes out of his mouth unconsciously", said Behari Charan in reply."

They all three burst into a fit of laughter and one of them pushed him before a horse and then placed him upon it, and behind him sat the ruffian; then they galloped off with full speed, all the while Behari Charan praying to his God for the destruction of these devils.

The way they followed ran through the midst of the village, and all the villagers stood aghast at the strange sight of two men riding on one horse. In their bewildered state of mind, they explained the strange event by arguing in their mind that an old man had been mercifully taken care of, and so placed on the back of one of their own horses with its rider inspite of his very great inconvenience. Moreover, they found that the man was old and quite unable to walk, for this

reason he was given that special favour by these Mahamedans.

Behari Charan thought within himself that the villagers had been deceived by the apparent conduct of these rogues.

After passing over the villages, the Fakir stopped and came near Behari Charan and gave a smart slap on his face saying, "Be careful you devil!" and then he got down from his horse.

CHAPTER XXXIV

DULALI'S EMBASSY

There took place no untoward circumstances while on the way—the Pathans passed through several villages, but Behari Charan remained quite speechless as if he were dumb. The Fakir was rather pleased with him for this muteness on his part,—they had now got to the mogul Empire and so they were past any dangers. They entertained no fears of any kind, nay they thought within themselves they were the supreme lords now.

Towards evening they arrived at an hotel where they found Mahammad Toki with his retinue. The Fakir brought poor Behari Charan before the General, pushing him all the way. He said in a surprise,—“Who is he?”

“The fellow was a follower of the Prince and so I have arrested him”, was the reply.

“What is the good of arresting him?” was the further query.

“It will bring this good that the Empress would believe our statement when she sees him”, rejoined the Fakir,

Mahammad Toki who had already been baffled in his mission and had enough of humiliation was naturally in a bad humour, He replied rather annoyed.—“Have the reward you yourself, I do not care”.

At this the Fakir gave a frown, Inwardly he was bent upon working Mahammad Toki's ruin. But without saying any thing in reply he dragged poor Behari Charan to a side of the hotel, addressing the Pathans at the same time,—“Just keep a strict eye upon him ; see that he does not scamper off.”

Finding an old man arrested in this fashion, especially when he was looking agape, the persons present there could not make out what it all meant, and so they began to look at Gahar Jan (Jan Mahammad) in a surprise. Some of them went so far as to enquire about the cause of the arrest. But Jan Mahammad replied rather in annoyance. “The beggar is but a dacoit.”

They received these words with a laugh, but said nothing.

All were busy preparing their food in several places while the horses were busy eating their fodder when there was a great commotion at the inn, the like of which was not experienced for a long time.

But as for Behari Charan, he had nothing to eat, nobody gave him anything to eat and so he wrapped himself up with the turban he had on his head and lay down under the strict surveillance of a Pathan who sat by his side. All around there were people busy with their own work, so that there was no means for Behari Charan to escape. He knew full well that it would cost him his life if he attempted a bit to escape at the hands of this ruthless Pathan.

All on a sudden there was a reverse of fortune among the Mogul heroes. All of them began to look at one another with stern eyes. Some of them rose to their feet. The Pathan thundered forth like an infuriated tiger,—“Jan Mahammad, who the deuce are you to give me abuses like this without cause?”

Jan Mahammad was eating his meal at a distance before he gave any reply, the Pathan, infuriated, stormed,—“Jan Mahammad, hold your tongue.”

At this Jan Mahammad said with feelings of surprise,—“What! Have you run mad? What on earth could be the reason I should abuse you? Don't you see I am eating my bread?”

The Pathan said in a rage,—“A lie again? I have heard it with my own ears.”

Jan Mahammad turned round all on a sudden like one struck by an arrow. Some body from behind addressed him into his ear,—“Oh you, wretch.” The same words at every one's ears—all gave a jump. A riot was about to take place. Mahammad Toki hastened to the spot to see what was up.

This was followed by another reverse of fortune. Close by there was a terrible howling of the tiger. Every one cried “tiger” and ran inside for fear of his life. There was uproar all over. All these un-looked for affairs made Jan Mahammad and the two Pathans totally forget about Behari Charan who might have taken advantage of this forgetfulness on their part and so could easily have got out of their clutches, but

instead of moving even an inch, he remained wrapped up all over as before.

Mahammad Toki ordered a torch to be lighted. Then he went out bagging the tiger with a few brave men, but found no trace of the animal anywhere. He looked in all directions for the tiger, but for nothing, and then he came back quite disappointed. He told all his men to be on the alert with the words that the tiger must be near at hand and that it might make its appearance again. He also told him to inform him about it in case they get any scent of it.

The General was going to retire for rest; but instead of doing that, he came near Jan Mahammad and stood stupefied. Then pointing to a certain spot where Jan Mahammad had kept his dress and turban together, he exclaimed rather in abhorrence,—“What is this, eh?”

Lo! there was the grunting of a pig from within the cloth. And it is not at all difficult, as every body knows, to make out the melodious cry of a young swine. A swine within a Mahamedan's turban! How shocking! Mahamedans were at their meals with swine in the midst! Mahammed-Toki's face became crimson with rage. He questioned in a dreadful tone,—“What is this, Fakir, eh?”

Mahammad Toki was not in the least aware who this Fakir was and where he hailed from. At the command of the Empress he came with the Fakir—this was all. It was not the custom to make any enquiries

whatsoever. But whoever he may have been, howsoever favourite he may have been of the Empress, he should not have laid a pig before the Mahamedans while eating and have thus done an act so dishonourable and revolting to the Mahamedan sentiment. He thundered forth,—“Fakir, what’s all this, eh?”

When all people came up to the spot, the grunting of the pig became more terrific. Every one felt astonished and chafed with rage. Jan Mahammad was quite speechless. Like a snake charmed by the spell he was staring at his own dress with eyes wide open—the grunting became louder and louder.

“I would have taken your life had you not been a man of the Empress”, rejoined Mahammad Toki.

But all of them had not the same amount of patience and fortitude like the General. One of them gave Jan Mohammad a smart slap on the check. He burst out sobbing in agony,—“For Heaven’s sake, I know nothing of this. Some infidel must be at the root of all this, I assure you.” Everyone’s meal was spoilt. All of them threw away the food outside with feelings of deep abhorrence. Some one fetched a bamboo intent on chasing the swine—an animal abominable to the followers of Islam.

Every one moved aside. The Moguls from a considerable distance shook off the Fakir’s dress with the long bamboo and anon the grunting ceased. Lo! Nothing inside! Then everyone began to look at one

another with feelings of astonishment. Everyone assumed a grave appearance.

"Examine carefully. There was grunting a minute ago", was the remark from Mahammad Toki.

The Mogul threw off the Fakir's dress with the bamboo, but he found no trace of any thing so abominable.

"Perhaps the grunting was outside. Such mistakes are quite possible at night", observed one of them.

Mahammad Toki said after a little pause,—“Probably so. Take the torch outside and examine carefully.”

A minute ago every one had gone out in search of the tiger, but now for the swine. There was a search all around, but in vain—neither the tiger nor the swine.

Then one of them while running his finger through the hair addressed the General,—“It is not advisable for us to stay here at night?”

“What! are you afraid of ghosts?” questioned Mahammad Toki.

“The evil eyes of a goblin sometimes fall upon such houses, Sir, just listen. Lo! There is the nasal sound as if from the far-off sky. “There I go—there I go—there I go”, was the modest reply.

The sound came down bit by bit, as it were, from the firmament. There was a deep pallor evident on every Mogul face. Their hearts began to throb violently and the legs began to shake like an aspen leaf. At this Mahammad Toki ordered the horses to be made

ready at once as in his opinion it was not safe to stay there a minute more.

No sooner had these words come out of the lips of the General than the Mogul ran in breathless haste and caught hold of their respective horses. The couple of Pathans—Mahammad Jan's men—mounted their horses first of all. Mahammad Jan himself had no time to think of taking his clothing with him. He ran for fear of his life in the same state into which he was before, as the dreadful nasal twang became closer and closer.

Almost all the Moguls had mounted their horses already when a loud lamentation rose—hundreds of female voices burst out crying. Mahammad Jan had heard such a cry once before. The Moguls utterly bewildered, ran away in breathless haste for fear of their lives.

At this stage Behari Charan threw off the cover with which he wound himself up and having got up exclaimed within himself,—“The fellows wanted to take Behari Charan under arrest. Indeed! As the Fakir gave me a push, he got a better compliment in return—a terrible smart slap on the face, so much so, that his cheeks have become a shade red.”

Behari Charan came outside, but he found no body in the inn, the Moguls had all made their escape. Behari Charan soliloquised within himself,—“I find Dulali has just followed me,—a veritable gem—where are you?”

“Here, I am”, was the reply from Dulali.

With these words Dulali made her appearance from within the darkness. She added,—“Now, brother, just see how I have learnt the nasal twang. “There I go”

“Excellent. Like tutor, like pupil. It is that twang which enabled me to know of your arrival here. I began my operations, of course, before that. Breathes there any soul in this land who could keep us in confinement?”

CHAPTER XXXV

GAHARJAN'S MISERIES

"Well, what now?" questioned Dulali.

"I'm thinking of calling on His Imperial Majesty at Agra", returned Behari Charan.

"What for?" added Dulali, "You see we shan't be free from danger only on account of Gaharjan or any other wretch like him. That rascal would attempt the life of our Prince, so that he must get rid of by any means."

"What! attempting the life of our Prince!"

"Surely he would. However cautious our Prince might be, he would one day fall into the cruel hands of this dangerous man. He would find the opportunity of finishing the Prince some day or other and then it would be all over with him. So much energy, so much labour and care would all go for nothing."

"Then what's to be done now?"

"My intended visit to Agra is over that question only,"

"Supposing he finishes you?"

"That won't affect any body."

Then he re-assured Dulali in the following terms,—
"Don't bother yourself over that. It's not in the power of any person to make away with Behari Charan—the milk-maid's son."

"Well, I, too, mean to go with you. There would be less danger if we are together."

"I would have taken you with me if it had been necessary; on the contrary, it would bring more trouble. Specially, mother and sister are sorely anxious for us. Just go to Udaypore and see sister before you leave for the mount Girnar. I also join you there."

"Any word for them?"

"Tell them everything, not omitting to mention that I have been to Agra to find a remedy against Gahar Jan. Now, have you got any money in the purse?"

"Plenty."

"Then you won't run short of expenses, I hope,"

"Certainly not. Dulali is not in the least anxious about that."

"I know. Now let us try to get some food from the village. The night is not far advanced yet."

Both of them came to a grocer's shop that was close by and found the grocer at his *gadi*. Now Behari Charan returned to the inn with flour, pulse, wood and cooking utensils, in fact, with everything necessary for the purpose. Then Dulali set herself to preparing the food, when Behari Charan observed with a laugh,—"The beggars have had no food. At the grunting of the swine they have thrown away all their eatables with great abhorrence."

Dulali said with a laugh.—"Just conceive how long it would take us before we can think of going to bed."

After dinner they passed the night at that inn. The following morning Behari Charan had sent Dulali to Udaypore before he made for Agra with the garb as the ascetic's disciple.

Mahammad Toki's party did not proceed far. They got actually dispersed, not knowing any thing about their movements through fear ; as for Jan Mahammad he could not find out the path and went far into the wrong way when in the morning he found he had gone in the direction opposite the one that led to Agra, and that was the case with most of them. The day-light helped them now to take the right path and many of them meeting one another were proceeding towards Agra with but dejected hearts. Jan Mahammad met one or two of his men and so joined them. While they were trudging on in this way, Behari Charan overtook them in half the way.

Through fear he made his horse run very fast the whole night owing to which the poor animal was almost, half-dead and his legs refused to move any further, so that he was moving slow and gaspingly, and so Behari Charan could easily overtake him with the words 'My Lord'.

At this Jan Mahammad almost sprang to his feet while on horse-back ; he rivetted his gaze on Behari Charan with his eyes wide open for some time. The previous night's affairs had actually turned his head as a result of which he could not make out Behari Charan at first and after a while he questioned,—“Are n't you the same fool ?”

"Yes, my Lord, the same poor victim", was the modest reply.

Jan Mahammad kept on staring on Behari Charan with harder eyes. Revolving with his mind many things about Behari Charan, he soliloquised within himself,—“He is not an ordinary man, or the Prince would not allow him to be one of his party. He is evidently in dispute. Then who on earth could he possibly be? Were he any Mogul Chief or General, surely I would have made him out. There is no one in the Mogul court—whether male or female—whom I know not. Then who on earth could he possibly be?”

“He looks to be a foreigner, but there is a great doubt whether a Hindu or a Musalman. This much I can understand from his talk that he is a low class man—a menial. A gentleman, whatever simulation he might practise, can easily be traced out.”

His strong common sense enabled him to conclude that the fellow must be a common valet to any rich gentleman, and that he was not a Mogul, at all events, not a true Musalman, on the contrary, a Hindu in all probability.

Having stared on Behari Charan for a while he demanded,—“Who the deuce are you?”

“For God's sake, I'm but a poor Hindu with no one under the sun to call my own. The couple of Sanyasins were passing by my village, and I joined them with a view to devote myself to their service, a practice so common among Hindus, my Lord,” was the reply.

"May be", thought Jan Mahammad within himself, "the Hindus generally join Sanyasins like this. And it is no wonder that this old fool would join the Sanayasi Prince. If that be the case, *i.e.* if he does not belong to the Prince I would be simply ridiculed by my presenting this simpleton before the Empress; not only so, she would get awfully enraged—a thing too dreadful to think of."

"Where are you going to?" questioned Jan Mahammad.

"To your Lordship", replied Behari Charan with clasped hands.

"But why to me, beggar?"

"You have snatched me away from the Sanyasi to this distant place and I have not a farthing with me and I shall simply be starved on the way."

"Go and beg."

"My Lord, no body gives alms to the beggar now—a-days", replied Behari Charan almost in tears,

Jan Mahammad thought within himself,—"Had he been the Prince's man, surely he would have taken the opportunity of making his escape and would not have appeared before us. Whatever he says seems to be true."

He now questioned,—"Where are you going this way?"

"Wherever your Lordship would take me, I am prepared to go. Your Lordship told me you would take me to His Imperial Majesty and in that case I would lay my miseries before him and he would surely

take pity on this old man. Your Lordship will be sorry to learn that there is no one in this wide world to feel for this poor soul."

Jan Mahammad was about to dismiss him with the gift of a rupee but it occurred to him then and there,—*"No, I won't. To be forewarned is forearmed.* Supposing he is one of the Prince's party, who knows he has not come to me with a sinister motive? There is not the least doubt as to the fact that there are many clever men with the Prince. Who knows that this fellow is not one of them? With all that, he should not be let off under any circumstances whatsoever."

Thinking all this to himself he told Behari Charan to follow him with the assurance that he should see to his affairs, and that he would have no difficulty or trouble in any way.

"May the blessings from above be showered upon you", exclaimed Behari Charan.

With these words Behari Charan dogged Jan Mahammad at his horse's heels like a slave.

Going a short distance Jan Mahammad said to himself,—*"This fellow must be tested,"* then he said openly,—*"You have to embrace Islamism and so have to take beef"*

"For Heaven's sake, excuse me for that", was the plaintive reply.

"I will make you eat beef as sure as I am Jan Mahammad."

Behari Charan burst out crying. At this Jan

Mahammad thought within himself,—“No, I am under vain misgivings. The beggar is but a dunce blockhead.”

Then he assured him,—“Don't you cry. You won't have to become Mahamedan.” Behari Charan began to wipe off his eyes.

Now only Jan Mahammad and Behari Charan wended their way alone the Mogul heroes having joined the General already. They were now passing through a village inhabited by Hindus when a reverse of fortune happened to them. The whole village rushed out with the words “beat! beat! The loud vociferations “beware! beware! The Fakir has come here to convert every one into islamism coming from the lips of Behari Charan had already reached their ears. Now they all fell upon their victim with clubs and sticks and gave him hard thrashing with the words “here's the beggar, here he is”. Behari Charan moved aside. This belabouring caused Jan Mahammad to implicate them with the words “Save me, oh save me!” Even this did not cool their temper. The women failed not to pour cow-dung water on his head—the greatest humiliation conceivable. They wended away his horse and turned him out of the village in a moribund condition with kicks upon kicks,

Behari Charan said to himself,—“Oh thou wretch! Dare you make Behari Charan eat the beef! what audacity! You have not come to know that you have caught a Tartar. More is in store for you, bear in mind.”

In the outskirts of the village the poor Jan Mahammad was seated under a tree stroking his own body with his hands when Behari Charan happened to be there, addressing him "My Lord !"

Roaring like an infuriated lion Jan Mahammad exclaimed,—“Be off, you, beggar,”

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE MOGUL COURT.

But Behari Charan did not ; on the contrary he observed'—

'I don't mean to take your life. Rest assured that the gallows is your fate as soon as you arrive at Agra. I'm going to His Imperial Majesty and would lay before him your misdeeds. Don't you dream of doing any harm to the Prince, know that I'm his constant companion and you won't have any pardon at my hands. Be careful.

Saying this Behari Charan went away from the spot with quick steps. The poor Jan Mahammad fixed his gaze towards him with mingled feelings of anxiety and surprise. When Behari Charan was out of sight. Jan Mahammad stood up and moved with great difficulty, his whole body having been smashed with the thrashing.

He did not take the way to Agra, but took some other way. From that day he disappeared without letting any body know what had become of him.

Behari Charan arrived at Agra in due time. On getting to the fort he found that His Imperial Majesty had his Court open ; a crowd of persons had assembled before the Palace.

In those days, to get an admittance into the Royal

Court—the Grand Durbar of the Mogul Badsa and to occupy a state-chair in the Council Hall of that Imperial Assemblage, was no easy matter. The Durbar—the very word,—O, what a volume of association is connected with it; it awakens in our mind all that is noble, all that is grand, all that is majestic, all that is magnificent. Then again those who had wielded at will their royal sceptre over the most magnificent empire that the world has ever seen, extending from the snow-capped Himalayas down to the ocean-kissed Comorin—"an empire wider than the Persia of Alexander, richer than the Gallia of Cæsar, more concentrated and more homogeneous than the vast territories of Trojan"—the Durbar—the Imperial Court of such an august sovereign, is a spectacle beyond description, more to be realized by conception than to be painted in words.

The architecture of the *Dewani Amm* of Agra in an architecture of historical interest,—a very large and commodious building, the Jewelled ceiling of which was supported by columns of pure white marble, bedecked with gems and Jewels of the first water, and carved with all the scenes of both nature and animated kingdom quite in a natural way;—any thing that is noble, any thing that is grand, any thing that is beautiful, and any thing that is sublime,—each had its own place in the decoration of the architecture, and presenting more a view of the fairy kingdom than any thing earth, earthy,

Such a Durbar, indeed, is truly an optical delusion, The doors and the windows, and the other openings and apertures of that spacious hall, were made with such a wonderful skill and ingenuity that both air and light may not only freely pass through them, but the rays of the sun and the beams of the moon falling on its crystal white columns and reflected thereon, may display such a blending of colour more harmonious and more majestic than the rainbow itself—a sight unique of its kind ; Oh, he who has not witnessed that sight cannot conceive of it.

On that ornamented carved marble-paved floor was spread a downy carpet of mellowed hue, charming to the eye and itself worth the fortune of a prince,—and upon that spacious carpet were cushion-seats for councillors ;—the seats were made up of silk and velvet and embroidered with gold and gems, and all placed equidistantly from the Royal 'seat, according to the rank and position of the councillors, presenting a picturesque picture of one vast sheet of immense embroidery,—or rather, a gold-embroidered and jewelled chessboard.

In a side of the Throne-room there we find the precious *Msnad* on which His Imperial Majesty was seated robed in royal dress set with the most precious jewels. In his side, a little below, the ministers were seated in a kneeling posture ; at a little distance the nobles and the generals ; the mace-bearers were standing with gold-maces on all sides ; two

persons were fanning the Emperor with gold-tail fans one person was holding over His Majesty's head the red royal umbrella, fringed with gold and studded with various precious stones. The Mogul and Rajput Generals dressed in variegated colours and costumes were seated according to their respective ranks ; in fact, the pomp and pageanty, the grandeur and magnificence of the place was beyond description.

All on a sudden His Majesty gave a start, looking behind. Quite surprised, he demanded of the Prime-minister,—

“Who is it that spoke just now ?”

The old minister replied with downcast looks and in a modest tone,—

“No one, Your Imperial Majesty.”

The Emperor started up again and looked behind. This time he heard distinctly some body whispering into his ears.

“I have come.”

Lo and behold ! there was none behind or beside the Emperor, and he said with feelings of great astonishment,—

“Yes, I've heard distinctly the plaintive tone of a human being with my own ears.”

The voice articulated again.—

“Your Imperial Majesty knows this poor and devoted servant Behari Charan who had the fortune of displaying his powers before you while at Fatepur,”

This reminded Jahangir of every thing,—he did not forget about Julekha's letter, and he said with a smile,—

"Thhre's a man standing outside, Behari Charan by name, who must be presented at once."

At this Imperial mandate a few persons rushed towards the main gate, and shouted for Behari Charan, This voice echoed a hundred-fold. Outside there was a terrible uproar. All the persons present looked at one another, as they were at a loss to make out who this blessed Behari Charan was, and also the reason of the Emperor's suddenly wanting him. Every one spoke to the other about this Behari Charan, but alas, no Behari Charan was to be seen there.

Behari Charan showed himself through the crowd at last. He was no other than a Hindu Fakir. This was resounded by a hundred lips but in a low key. The officers, too, became quite surprised at finding Behari Charan. Why did the Emperor want such a vagabond—how could he know that this vagabond was in the midst of the crowd—was the question that troubled every body, but there was no time to pause and ponder. The officers dragged him at once into the chamber and presented him before His Majesty. This gave every one the opportunity of looking at the face of the vagabond now.

This was not the first time that Behari Charan had been to the Mogul Court. He had come here several times as the Moulvi of Fatepur, so that there was no

cause for him to get confused. He appeared before His Majesty and gave him the most respectful homage, as usual. The Emperor was about to tell him something, but suddenly he got surprised, looking towards the old Minister. The Minister sprang to his feet with pallor all over his face; he looked as if in a swoon. He exclaimed with a choked voice,—

“Your Imperial Majesty! Oh my God! A snake—a snake within my dress. I’m almost finished, my life is about to burst.”

In fact, a black snake was chafing and foaming with rage within the old Minister’s clothing. Every one looked stupefied and felt himself almost in a suffocation. At this juncture, below the *Masnad* where His Imperial Majesty was seated a couple of cats began to caterwaul terribly. Everybody understood there was a regular struggle between these two cats,—everyone was at his wit’s end. This was an incident without a parallel. Everyone was afraid it would cost him his life.

All on a sudden the Emperor burst into a loud laugh, and addressing the Minister said with a laugh,—

“Compose yourself. Don’t be afraid.”

The Minister shaking all over, replied in a faltering voice,—

“Sire, will you kindly see to my dress taken off?”

The Emperor remarked with a laugh,—

“It would be quite shocking to find you naked

before this public court. Won't it! Now, sit down, no fear."

The macebearers were trying to turn out the cats from below the *Masnad*. But the Emperor commanded them not to be anxious as there were no cats in the court-room.

The hissing of the snake and the caterwauling of the cats both stopped, when the Emperor addressed Behari Charan,—

"Really, you possess extraordinary powers and this I came to know while at Fatepur, in fact, I heard everything about you. Would you make an exhibition of those cries to this Court? Cry once more."

With a downcast look Behari Charan laid himself prostrate before His Majesty and said in a modert tone,—

"I can do so at Your Majesty's command; but I—I—I have a petition before Your Majesty."

"What's that?"

"Laughing would be more fitting sequel in a Court like this, my Lord."

"Very well, go on."

"Should I make any other person my butt, he would get angry, so with your consent permit me to make Your Majesty,—"

Instantly the Emperor began to fart, as it were, in the public court, and so there was no other alternative for him than to run away from the spot laughing in his sleeve. The officers restrained themselves with great

difficulty so long, but now it was beyond bounds and so they all burst into a loud laughter. The old Minister came up to Behari Charan and patting him on the back exclaimed,—

“Bravo Bravo !”

The next moment everyone became stupefied, as all on a sudden hundreds of women burst out crying loudly, even the beating of their breasts became distinctly audible. Everyone became stunned—what on earth could be the cause of this sudden reverse of fortune to the Royal Court ?

The Emperor returned ere long and took his seat on the *Masnad*. He commanded,—

“A lac of gold coins and the highest title is your reward ; you see, Behari Charan, I’m extremely pleased with you. Really you are gifted with marvellous powers.”

All the persons present on the spot exclaimed in a body,—

“Astounding—simply astounding. Quite fit for a lac of gold coins, a thousand times fit for the reward.”

Behari said with clasped arms,—

“Your Imperial Majesty knows everything. What shall I do with gold coins ?”

“What do you want, then ?”

“Your Majesty knows that also. When your Majesty is graciously pleased with this humble and devoted servant, Your Majesty would pardon the

Crown-Prince and the one he has married her—Your Majesty would accept as the future Queen-Empress—as a fitting reward for my pains.”

The Emperor's heart was full of the milk of human kindness, and his eyes became heavy with tears at finding such fidelity on the part of this old servant. Controlling himself after a while, he addressed the Court in a choked voice,—

“You all listen. I lay before you that my beloved son Prince Khurum would inherit the throne after my demise, and that he would be proclaimed as Emperor Shahjahan then, and the lady whom he has taken as his wife would be proclaimed as the Queen-Empress under the name of Tajmahal. All of you must swear in the name of God that you would not proceed against my wishes.”

At this all of them stood up and took oath in the name of God that they would abide by the Imperial behest. It is on the strength of this mandate that Khurum could sit on the throne safely and without any opposition. Even Azofkhan, Nurjehan's brother, did not stand in the way.

The Emperor rose from his seat and commanded the Minister to present Behari Charan the promised reward and send him to the *Dewani Khas* after dusk. On his arrival he would be presented before the Empress Nurjehan where the Begums would feast their eyes.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

IN THE BEGUM MAHAL

As the beauty of the *Dewani Aam*—the Council Hall, was a wonder of the world, so was the *Dewani Khask*—the Imperial Court of the Empress Nurjehan. In beauty and splendour, in pomp and grandeur, in majesty and magnificence, it far outshone the *Dewani Aam* of the Emperor Jahangir; it was an edifice of unparalleled workmanship, a temple of luxury, a thing of enjoyment,—making, in fact, a paradise on earth.

A thing of beauty is a joy for ever, and who can count the value, or measure the depth, of such a superb temple, such a splendid building, such a stupendous piece of architecture, such a magnificent work of art and skill, and forming, as it were, the crown jewel of grandeur and glory, but he whose mental ken can appreciate is superb excellence;—wealth cannot buy it; it is the heart only that appreciating its intrinsic worth, melts itself at its shrine.—words cannot describe it; it is a thing more to be seen, felt and enjoyed than mimicing a faint description.

Begum—oh, what an association of ideas is connected with that sweet ever-charming name. It kindles in the human mind feelings and sentiments of all that lovely and beautiful, of all that is grand and romantic, of all that is delightful and luxurious, of all that

is splendid and bright. The very sound of the word captivates the heart, charms the mind, and enraptures the soul. No wonder, therefore, if people would dream of something akin to the fairy region when they hear of the *Begum Mahal* and picture into their own mind a dreamland of felicity, beaming with the effulgence of the vernal bright moon floating in the ocean of liquid gold before their fancied vision. And when such a hallowed place of light and radiance is bedecked with be vies of beauteous beings, each resembling a perfect paragon of angelic grace, and each sitting on her cushioned seat of velvet and silk, placed on the mosaic floor and each bejewelled with gems and Jewels of priceless value, and pearls of peerless beauty ;— O ! the lustre and radiance of such a court really bedims the rays of the lord of the day, and casts into shade the effulgence of the queen of the night ;—and to picture into fancy its splendour and glory would, indeed, be soaring on elysian reverie far beyond the conception of human conception. And let us remember ere we sit in judgment on the individual charms of any one of the damsels forming the bevy—and it ought to be regarded as peculiarly extenuating circumstances that Runeberg would have expressed his heart's desires in strains like the following ;—

“I gaze on a bevy of damsels,
I'm gazing and gazing incessant,
The fairest all I'll be choosing,
And yet as to choice I'm uncertain ;

For one has the brightest of bright eyes

Another girl's cheeks are more rosy,

A third one's lips are the riper,

The fourth has a heart more tender.

There isn't single maid lacking

A something that captures my senses.

There isn't one there I'd say "no" to,

Oh, would I might kiss the whole bevy!"*

Here in the midst of such an assemblage of such angelic forms and grace was seated on her *Masnad* the exquisite Nurjahan, the Light of the World, and by Her Majesty's side shone her Imperial Consort the resplendent Jehangir,—the Conqueror of the World.

"And when I gazed upon her red mouth sweet,

To match whose charms not Jove himself were

meet,

"That mouth for laughter and for kisses framed,

I fell thereof so amorous straightway

That I lacked power to do aught or to say"

In fact, "the roguish mouth," says the poetic Harvey, "with the white teeth and the moist red, delicately-shaped lips say to every man who is not made of marble, 'Kiss me Kiss me.'

"Her fresh mouth's playing

Seems ever saying

To kiss I am fain

Again, again."

There in this earthly paradise of beauty were

* Rendered into English Verse by William Frederick Harvey, M. A.

seated beauties of incomparable grace and exquisite loveliness, each rivalling her sister in some outward lineament of the body or some mental equipment of the temperament that made the Imperial Harem of the Light of the World, not only an Imperial exhibition of art and ingenuity, of skill and industry, of pomp and magnificence, of grandeur and gorgeousness, of genius and fancy, of splendour and glory, of brightness and hue, but an assemblage of God's glorious gifts—a fair of fairies, a mart of beauties ;—a wonder of wonders, a marvel of marvels.

And how human was Byron's wish that all women had but one mouth so that he might kiss them all at the same time.

“That womankind had but one rosy mouth,
To kiss them all at once from north to south.”

Even an ecclesiastic such as Aeneas Silvius Picecolomini, when wishing to describe how beautiful and fascinating a young girl was, writes that “no one could see her without being at once seized with a desire to kiss her.” It ought here to be remarked that he wrote this before he was made Pope and assumed the name of Pius II.

It is now, or the matter of that, ought to be taken for granted that women, beautiful women—and kisses are of a piece. It is at the same time nature's ordinance, and we find it verified in all countries and in all ages. Odin in instructing mortals in the wisdom of life says ;—

“Ships are for voyages,
 And shields for ward,
 Sword-blades to smite,
 And maids to kiss.”

And the Greeks sing ; “Wine belongs to chestnuts,
 honey to nuts, and kisses morning and night to young
 maids,”

There is a German proverb which goes a great way
 to support that the womankind is also of this same
 mind. Says the German maiden, “I cannot bear
 kissing when I am not taking any part in it.”

Now if, inspite of all I have said and quoted, some
 rigid moralist or other will persist that kissing young
 damsels is always a vicious habit, and if, peradventure,
 a still sterner moralist will maintain it is a sin into the
 bargain, I would say in my defence, that, in any case, it
 is one of those sorts of sin that are venial. “Kiss
 me,” runs an Italian folk-say, “the Pope will forgive
 you ; kiss me and I will kiss you, and the Pope will
 forgive us both.”

“O bella figlia, O bella garzona.

Baciate me, che il Papa-vi perdona ;

Baciate me, che io bacero yui.

Che il Papa ci perdona tuttie dui.”

No wonder, therefore, when the Pope is so
 compassionate then a subordinate servant of the Church
 such as Aerestrup's Father Hugo would say :

“Child, a kiss is but a trifle,

If it's only long and sweet.”

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

A NIGHT IN THE IMPERIAL HAREM.

To recapitulate: It was evening. The Begum Mahal was illuminated. Ten thousand lights were lighted up, and the illuminations were quite befitting the regal hall of Imperial Agra. On every side gerandoles, in the shapes of cypresses and lotuses and various kinds of lights in variegated lamps were burning bright, and their lights, reflected on the jewels with which they were illuminated, shone with such splendour as to bedim the lustre of the autumnal bright moon ; and

Enchanted seem'd the scene to view
With chandeliers of gorgeous hue,
And candlebras in which burn'd
Pure lights, with camphor, amber fed,
Whose clear and radiant breath return'd
Fragrance, such as the bridal bed
Of kings and queens, are known to bear.
Sweet, balm-like was the perfum'd air ;
Bright in the goblets laugh'd the wine ;
'Twould seem as spirits all divine,
Were smiling in the crystal vase ;
Music's delicious sound arose,
Angelic, in its dying close ;
It seem'd as if a seraph bright
Sung to the Author of all light,

Before the footstool of His grace ;
 Aye, wine was there to cheer the heart,
 And music too, to melt the soul ;
 And many a poison'd, deadly dart
 Were cast from eyes, whose magic roll
 Enchanted thousands.—Selim gay,
 And ladies bright assembl'd there ;
 The *bela* and the rose of May
 In bright festoons perfum'd the air,
 Carpets of richest hues were spread,
 And fragrant liquids o'er them shed ;
 The hall to the enchanted eyes
 Appear'd a real Paradise."

The scene was, indeed, one of the most gorgeous description. There was the *Masnad* covered with gold, placed on rich carpets, with a pillow adorned with whatever is most splendid and magnificent, glittering, as it were, with gold and gems and redolent of sweet scent and delicious odours ; over it an awning of brocade was stretched, with a fringe of pearls on silver poles studded with precious stones ; and in front of the *Masnad* artificial trees and plants, formed of various jewels, with fruits and flowers and leaves attached, and gay birds with beautiful plumage roosting on the branches,—oh, one would say they were nature's own production,—were erected in beds of gold. On this *Masnad* was reclining the Emperor Jahangir and by His Majesty's side was his beloved consort. Their Majesties, arrayed in purple robes and wearing the sparkling *lapus*

lazuli, shone resplendent amid the dazzling blaze. Lovely Maids of Honour in their lovely fancy costumes of velvet and brocade, and with their diamonds and rubies and pearls of great value, made striking figures among them. Handsome female-servants and beautiful slaves, and armed damsels, from Kilmak, Turkistan, Abyssinia, Uzbak Turtary, and Kashmir, were drawn up in two lines, dressed in costly attires and rich jewels, with their arms folded across, and each standing in her appropriate station in a respectful attitude. Minstrels and choristers of angelic form and grace, with loose flowing tresses, and with ready-turned instruments, were in attendance to sing in concert. Indeed so beautiful was the scene that one might be almost tempted to say that, fairies had been let loose there with their wings shorn. Nor was this all. *Betel-boxes, gulap-pashes, itar-dans,* flower-pots, narcissus-pots, inlaid with gold and studded with precious stones, and silver spittoons, were all arranged in order. Camphorated candles were placed in golden candlesticks and rich glass shades were placed over them. The reflection of the lights falling on the precious stones with which they were set up, made the regal hall appear, as it were, inlaid with jewels. Dazzled with such splendour and intoxicated with the rich fragrance of the hall, the royal party sat in raptures. And the sparkling ruby wine of Portugal-perfumed with *Ketaki* and the exhilarating spirit of *Bed-Mushk*, scented with rose and cooled in iced-lemonade, poured in crystal cups set with precious stones, were perfor-

ming merry revolutions ; and the flowery orchestra of the flowery realm, bedecked with gems and jewels from head to feet and clothed in gala attire, and with loose and flowing tresses, began to enliven the scene by pouring out melody.

Indeed, such was the scene, and such the melody, "that had *Tan-Sen* been present at that hour, he would have forgot his strains ; and *Baiju-Baora*, would have gone mad." In the midst of such festivity, such soul-entrancing music, the suzerain thought of the inimitable Behari Charan, and expressed his royal pleasure to a eunuch. And Behari Charan, who was waiting his imperial master's royal command in the waiting saloon, was announced in a short time. He was heralded by a *Sidi*.

To cross

"...the starry threshold of the Begum's Court,
...where those immortal shapes of bright aerial
spirits live inspher'd

In regions mild, of calm and serene air."

and

"Through all restraint broke loose, to wing his way,

Nor far off heav'n, in the precincts of light,

Directly towards the new-created world,"

and violate the sanctity of the *Harem*,—the royal *Harem* the imperial seraglio,—the *Sanctum Sanctotum*, of such an august ruler as His Imperial Majesty the Lord of the Seven Climes,—the Conqueror of the Universe, and intrude upon the privacy of his royal consort,

the Light of the World, and especially at such a time as mentioned before, would have quelled the stout heart of a heroic soul and subdued his valour and vigour, and would certainly have made him tumble at the threshold, and forewarned him of his doom, nay even such an insignificant creature as a humble bee would have quaked with fear at the very idea of it. But Master Behari Charan was a *Khiradmand*. He was the past master of a hundred craft and an adept of no mean pretension. In fact, Behari Charan was the incarnation of wit and humour, of fun and frolic,—the living embodiment of all that is pleasant to the senses of human perception, of all that is gratifying to the caprices of individual fancy. No wonder, therefore, if he did not blush a little, nor hesitate a moment, much less had he any scruple to appear on the scene and add joy and merriment all round, and heighten the felicity of the festive party. The secret of Behari Charan's perfect self-possession at such a juncture, and under such extreme circumstances might be a puzzle—an enigma, a mystery to the profane eyes of the uninitiated. But then *Kniradmand* Behari Charan was no ordinary mortal, nor was he made of the common stuff. He was a genius incarnate, and he was conscious of his own ability, and had perfect confidence in his own skill. In fact, he was a psychologist and he knew the secret spring of light, the magic touch of which would scatter its illuminating rays all round, and brighten the scene into liveliness. And when making his appearance in the royal presence

and his oblation at the foot of the throne, Behari Charan kissed the ground and stood with crossed arms awaiting his liege lord's imperial commands, all eyes were at once centred on him. But, to and behold, as the Emperor was about to ask his protegee to make an exhibition of himself and display some of his incomparable feats of skill and wonder, his eyes suddenly fell on his beloved consort, who was in deep mental agitation and stood there in a ghastly manner,—a perfect picture of livid paleness and deadly pallor.

The sudden illness of his beloved consort and the pallid hue of her countenance which had hitherto been beaming with genial smile together with all the signs of contrition, exhibited by her, and evoking the sympathy of every one present there, made the Emperor uneasy, and his anxiety for her concern knew no bounds. But before he could muster courage to enquire of Her Majesty as to the cause of her ailment, Noorjahan, coming close to him, said, in a faltering voice,—“W-h-a-t's—t-h-a-t ! H-a-r-k ! T-h-e-r-e—t-h-a-t—”

“What—what, my dear?” precipitately asked Jehangir,

“Ah ! the same—the very same voice—no mistake about that. Oh ! it is quite distinct and audible, and there cannot be any mistake. Oh ! has it come back from its grave after the lapse of so long a time ! Is it resurrection or what ?” cried Noorjahan convulsively, and she struck closer to her lord.

Every one of the festive party was taken aback at

this, and even *Khirandmaud* Behari Charan showed symptoms of uneasiness. None there could hear any thing, still she maintained that a strange, a familiar voice, standing by her side whisper into her ear,—“Canst thou not recognise me, Oh, Noorjahan, or having become the favourite Queen of the *Badsha* hast thou forgotten me clean?”

The Emperor observing a pang to pass across her countenance, and himself getting deeply agitated and sorely puzzled, said in bewilderment,—“Oh! whom are you speaking of, Darling?” And darting an impatient glance, continued,—“I don’t find any one here, nor do I hear anything.”

“Noorjahan in a more tremulous voice cried,—“Why, it is quite distinct. Listen, it is the same,—the very same.—nay, it is the voice of S-h-e-r—K-h-a-n!”

Noorjahan has hardly done speaking, when, hark, “there came a burst of thundersound,”—and every one of the assembly heard it distinctly. It rang through that spacious hall as it burst forth,—

“Ha! ha!! ha!!!—Me not recognize, Noorjahan;—the Emperor may not, but how canst thou forget clean?”

The voice was invisible, no doubt, but, oh, its tone was familiar to all, and it went deep into the heart of Jehangir. For a moment he was dumb-founded. It recalled to his mind the incidents of a long-forgotten affair, and his heart sank within him. But presently he recovered himself. For turning to Behari Charan and

looking askance at him, his countenance became radiant with joy, while a gentle smile lightning-like played on his rosy lips. But without making an exhibition of his inner feelings, he, addressing the Empress, said in words of gentle accents and deep pathos,—“Oh, that’s nothing, My Dear,—a pure hallucination, a frenzy, an aberration of the mind ; ah, I see gentle gale is wafting along a breeze of phantasm this evening.”

Noorjahan getting agitated and her mind perturbed, was going to reply him petulantly, when, lo and behold, all of a sudden, she was startled, and stood up. Every one present there on the occasion; heard with bated, nay, suspended breath, the clash of arms at the main-gate and followed by a tumultuous uproar, There was a hurryscurry all round the *Dewani-Khas*, and the outcry betokened a scene of conflict, and a contest of arms, and a piercing cry rising from amid the clang of arms, from amid the din and bustle of the tumult, and almost rending the skies, rang out,—“Help ! Help ! Murder, Murder ! We seek the royal protection. Oh Lord deliver us from the hands of ruffians ! Oh Queen-Mother save our lives from the violence of malefactors !”

The ladies assembled grew alarmed, and the radiance of the *Dewani-Khas*, and the luxuriance of that brilliant hall now melted itself, like dew-drops in a summer morn, and the royal pavilion presented a dismal aspect, and loo turned into a dreary spot.

Nurjahan was descending from the *Masnad* with hasty steps, when the Emperor interrupting said,—

"Don't be impatient, My Dear Lady. Let us enquire into the matter."

But before His Majesty could get time to do so, when, lo, horror upon horror, in the immediate presence of Their Majesties,—nay, before their very eyes and in their own imperial saloon, the attending Maids of the Empress, kicked up a row among themselves, and from words they came to blows. The scene was neither an edifying one, nor did it augur well for any. One assailing another dealt her a most angry blow with her outstretched palm, and said,—“I warn thee, thou scapegrace, not to indulge in such vituperative language any more. There are Their Illustrious Majesties.”

Being thus roughly handled and beaten black and blue, and rudely insulted without any cause of aggravation or provocation, the aggrieved lady, boiled up with rage, returned the blow with tenfold vengeance and thundered forth, with a fierce countenance and rolling eyes,—“Now then thou hast got thy desert. Abuse,—thou hast not got thy fill as yet,—more lashes are in store for thee, wretch. Go where thou wilt, and do thy worst.” While another seizing the forelock of her mate next by her, yelled,—“Take care, I warn thee, a repetition of the same will hasten thee to thy doom, and I will curb thy speech for ever.”

Being thus assailed and affronted, outraged and what not, for no fault of hers, and beside herself with rage, she called forth her animal spirits into active

service, and freeing herself from the clutches of her assailant, she like a tigress fell upon her, tearing her embroidered wearing apparel into pieces and wounding her body with many a sharp prick, while her tongue poured over her head volleys of anathemas, and addressing her with many a vile expression of contumely and obloquy called her as the child of a street-sweeper and challenged her to open fight.

Thus everywhere of that hall of beauty, now turned into a dreary dismal place, presented too horrid a scene to behold. Every one of the Court-Beauties, now worked up to passion, looked more like an imp than a human being,—flashing fiery glances, and pouring torrents of filthy expressions.

The sight, though not a pleasing one, however, amused the Emperor very much, who taking out his handkerchief began to laugh in his sleeve, while the Empress Noorjahan was at her wit's end. Confused and confounded, she sat motionless in her place. But, lo ! the scene changes all of a sudden, and the Maids, hitherto so eager for measuring their strength with each other, now forgetting their own feelings of rancour and animosity, were trembling like aspen leaf, and they began to run pell-mell, as if afraid of their own lives ;—some darting off from their seats winged their way, so to say, the Royal seat and fell flat before Their Majesties, and crawling inside the *Masnad*. cried in a piteous tone,—“Mighty Emperor, save our lives. Listen ! There roars the tiger, breaking out of its cage.”

The Emperor and Empress distinctly heard the yelp,—the ferocious howling and growling of a tiger, quite close to the *Begum Mahal*, nay, very near the marble pillars of the hall, and the snarling is not only getting closer and closer every minute, but is apparently approaching the very seat of the Royalty.

The Emperor, elated with joy at these feats of marvel displayed by his protege, exclaimed,—“Bravo! *Khiradmand Behari Charan*! Enough! Your exhibitions are, I frankly confess, more extraordinary than the performance of famous jugglers, who juggle in broad daylight and produce phenomena by ocular delusion, but your feats are due to no optical delusion, they go and strike at the very core of the heart. And if I hadn't, from personal knowledge, known of your skill, I too, would certainly have fallen an easy prey to the fright, and would have cut as sorry a figure as these ladies here. Oh, how in a moment you have turned the *Begum Mahal* into a dandemonium! In fact, I am so satisfied with your skill and ability, that I know not how to reward your merit sufficiently.”

Behari Charan in acknowledgment of the kind compliments paid to him by the Emperor said, with most respectful obeisance,—“Sire, that your humble servant has been able to amuse your gracious self and to afford delight to her Imperial Majesty for a moment, is in itself a matter of self-congratulation, and no earthly reward can equal it in value or esteem.”

The ladies of the Imperial Court now realizing the

truth of the extraordinary turn of events and the parts they have played in the act, became ashamed of themselves, and hung down their heads in self-reproach, not knowing what to say to their august Sovereign, nor how to apologise to their sisters, for their most unseemly conduct and undignified expressions and uncourtly behaviour.

While the Empress thinking of the super-human powers, as it were, of a humble *Fakir*, a mendicant, which made the Sovereign of the earth and his Conqueror, a puppet in his hands, became awe-struck and sat stupefied like a dummy. But her admiration for this adept was none-the-less sincere, and when Her Exalted Majesty regained her self-possession and could speak out her thoughts, it was to echo the words which fell from the lips of her Lord. In fact, from that day forth Behari Charan became the star-jewel of the *Naarmahal*.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

BEFORE THE EMPRESS.

Behari Charan was truly a living instance of what an un-dreamt-of good could be achieved by a devoted servant, for a dreadful fire was about to be burning in the Mogul Court at this time ; a regular bloodshed was about to take place between the father and son—a river of blood was about to run at this stage in India ;—how many thousands of souls would have lost their lives, what a number of heroes would have fallen victims without any cause, and how it would have fared with the Mogul Empire at last, no body could ascertain, but for Behari Charan who was a common illiterate Court-Bufoon, it would be no exaggeration to call him the king among, ventriloquists and chameleons. It was this Behari Charan who was able to extinguish at once the fire that was going to be ablaze, by means of his marvellous powers. He was in the good graces of both the Emperor and the Empress. In a single night poor Behari Charan became, so to speak, the apple of the eye of the Begums, and *Bandis* (female-servants) as well. His powers of ventriloquism simply captivated the Empress, as the effects of which she was sometimes struck dumb, while at other times she was convulsed with laughter. As for the princess, she took off the

precious necklace" from her own neck and put it herself on Behari Charan's neck. By this gift Behari Charan became metamorphosed into a millionaire in a single day and a favourite of Their Imperial Majesties. In those days any person who could please the Empress in this way considered himself the luckiest person on the face of the earth. Probably the Empress would not have repressed the request of Behari Charan if he had asked for the Governorship of Bengal. Were such a stroke of fortune to fall to the lot of some other person, the ministers and other officials would have been envious of him—so much so that they would have borne actual hostility towards him, but with Behari Charan, it was otherwise. Everyone was pleased with, and astonished at, his marvellous powers and observed, one and all,—

"Lacs of gold-coins will not be a befitting reward for such a wonderful man."

At the time of departure Behari Charan was presented by the Empress with ten thousand gold-coins'—her own name engraved thereon.

Now, it is a known fact that the Emperor himself wrote the following on these coins,—

"The coin which bears the name of the Empress—that same coin is worth one hundred times more." It is, therefore, that the gift of the Empress is nothing short of ten lacs of gold-coins. Such a magnificent gift seems now to be a wonder; but this was not

uncommon thing in the Mogul Court. Such gifts were not to be found elsewhere in this wide world.

With due obeisance and hung-down looks Behari Charan replied in a modest tone,—

“Your Imperial Majesty, this humble and devoted servant of yours has also something to offer.”

At this the Empress looked Behari Charan in the face, rather in astonishment, and then she thought that Behari Charan would perhaps display something more, and so she said with a smile,—

“Well, what’s it?”

“I’ve just been here to give back something which belongs to your Majesty.”

Saying this he opened his bag and having brought out the ring which she had given to Julekha with her name engraved on it, presented it to the Empress. Her Majesty could at once make out that the ring was hers. And assuming a grave look, she observed in a solemn tone,—

“No; let it be hers, whom I gave it to. I don’t want it back. I’m sure it won’t be abused at her hands.”

“Your Imperial Majesty, she has renounced the world for good and for all. And this ring, precious as it is, has no attraction for her.”

The Empress said after a little pause,—

Then I make a gift of this ring to you. From to-day you are employed in the Mogul Court as the

Chief Official, and so this ring would be quite befitting your position."

"Your Imperial Majesty, as for myself, I've also renounced the world, I've no need of this precious possession."

The Emperor who was silent so long, demanded,—

"What will you do with the hoard of money you have got as a reward, then?"

"I was going to submit to Your Majesty that thing:—I'm going to make a gift of all this to a certain person," replied Behari Charan with folded hands.

"Who is that person?" was the next query.

"She is only a little girl. Perhaps Her Imperial Majesty has seen her."

"Whom do you mean?" enquired the Empress.

"She used to come to your attending maid Julekha often,—Dulali is her name."

"Yes—yes, I remember to have seen her several times," observed the Empress.

"Whatever I've obtained through Your Majesty's favour, I'll give her. Now I await your Majesty's command that all the money and the necklace be deposited in the State Bank until she should come and take these away in person."

"Where's she now?"

"I can't tell for certain. She would go to her mother—the late maid—(*via*) Udaipur. This much I know."

"Then you had better give this ring to her and send

her to me as I have lost the mother, I want to put the daughter in her place."

"Your Imperial Majesty, I'll communicate this thing to her. Now with your Imperial 'Majesties kind permission your devoted servant would take leave."

Neither the Emperor nor the Empress wanted to part with Behari Charan so soon, and so the Emperor said,—

"No—I want to put you in charge of some office."

"Your Imperial Majesty, I'm but a poor milkman's son, quite illiterate, besides grown old ; I'm, therefore, quite unfit for any responsible ministerial work. No state-business is possible for such a blockhead as I am, and moreover I've renounced the world," was the respectful reply.

"It's you, and you only, who could be fit for that work. Finish that business before you leave, and you leave with an appreciative recognition of your services."

Behari Charan was really in a fix. What botheration ! Approbation or disapprobation depends entirely upon their whims, thought he ; and, having made his obeisance, observed in a tone of commiseration,—

"Your Majesty's commands."

"Well, you must have heard of the Delhi murder. Haven't you ?" enquired the Emperor.

"Yes, My Lord, I have."

"I've engaged not a few person to unravel the mystery, but to no purpose. But, I verily believe, you can do this."

"I'm Your Majesty's most devoted and humble servant."

"I've got ample proof of your intellect, sagacity, cleverness and prudence; and the mystery in question you must unravel. Should you ferret out the murderer, or the murderers,—if more than one, a lac of gold coins would be yours. Her Majesty the Empress is also of the same opinion."

Saying this, the Emperor turned his eyes towards the Empress. and she said—

"Most assuredly."

"Go to Delhi. Go wherever you like, after you have finished your mission. This mystery must be solved any how."

"As Your Majesties command."

"One thing more. You have also to trace out the person who has murdered Prince Parvesh. You just start for Delhi at once. Dewan Ganga Mali would arrange every thing for your convenience or any thing you might be in need of.

"When Your Imperial Majesty entrust me with this charge out of favour, this devoted servant won't have to go so far as to Delhi," was the modest reply.

"Why?" questioned the Emperor with feelings of astonishment.

"For there has not been any murder at all in Delhi My Lord. What's the use of going there then?"

At this both the Emperor and the Empress exclaimed simultaneously,—

"Where has the murder take Place then?"

"Here—in Agra." was the ready response.

"What!—Here in Agra! You surprise me!"

"Yes, Your Majesties, here—within this Fort,—
within the precincts of this *Begum Mahal*"

At this Imperial Majesties fixed their gaze towards Behari Charan with feelings of great astonishment, while the Empress observed,—

"But all the dead bodies that were found at the Delhi Gate were all male persons."

The Emperor remarked in an emphatic tone,—

"No male person can ever dream of having an access into the *Begum Mahal*."

"Your Imperial Majesties would please forgive my insolence—male persons have sometimes entered the *Begum Mahal*; and so much so that a male person even lived in the *Begum Mahal* in the garb of a female," was the most modest reply,

At this the Emperor's face became crimson with rage, but, controlling himself with great difficulty, said with great indignation.

"You talk mere nonsense. None but eunuchs has access into the *Begum Mahal*. Misru is there to see to this only."

"With your kind permission, I would state every thing," returned Behari Charan.

"Yes, state you must." was the command,

"Her Imperial Majesty knows Gahar Jan, That fellow is not a *she* but a *he*," replied Behari Charan.

Here the Empress observed,—

“Yes, I remember Masru once brought before me a person of the name of Gahar Jan whom I engaged at his request, to search after Prince Khuram. That Gahar Jaun was a male person, and not a female,—I suspected once, from his talk. I want to know of you what you know of him.”

Behari Charan thought within himself,—

“I’m really in a nice fix. Heaven knows what would satisfy these people and what would not. Now a diamond necklace, and a moment later, the executioner’s noose! Oh! My God! What a dreadful and horrid place this Royal Court is!”

CHAPTER XL.

THE MYSTERIES OF THE BEGUM MAHAL.

After a little pause rejoined Behari Charan and said,—

“Who can dare act in defiance to Your Majesties’ commands. I am laying every thing before Your Majesty. The respected Julekha, though only an attending maid, was always held in high esteem by the Empress ; it was therefore, that I always had to keep an eye upon the *Begum Mahal*, and it was only on account of that alone that I was in a position to know what was unknown to others. And it was, for this reason too, that I could save her life when she once poisoned herself, and I believe Your Majesties know all about it.

“It is this constant watch over the *Begum Mahal*, and especially the frequent visits of Dulali to her mother here, and the existence of a betel shop, owned by my wife—Gangiya at the Chowk, that afforded me the exceptional opportunity of coming to know what was unknown to others. This also enabled me to know that a male person was living within the *Begum Mahal* in the garb of a female, and that the eunuch Masru had imported him from a place—but whence I know not—and kept him with him. That man has no moustaches or whiskers on his chin, and is very handsome-looking with a rather feminine look and grace so that nobody could

detect him when practising simulation, and it is only myself who could make him out. The fellow is a veritable rogue, but it must be admitted that he is clever in the extreme ; and it is that rogue who could make out the Prince while in disguise."

"Where is he now ?" interrogated the Emperor in a thundering tone.

Behari Charan now related to the Emperor what had happened to him in the valley—how he had captured him—how he had persecuted him ;—and, in fact, he informed His Majesty every thing he knew about him, and added,—

"I didn't mean to finish him, and that's why I let him off. But the sinner will have his desert from the High : he could have easily absconded and would have been free from danger, but he would be the last person to do so. He would be here,—sooner or later. To leave this *Begum Mahal* is an impossibility with him."

"Is it he, then, who is the author of the said tragedy ?"

"I'm going to submit every thing to Your Majesty. Through Masru's favour this fellow often used to go out to town and a covered palanquin was, therefore, always kept in readiness for him. When he was in the good graces of such a worthy person as Masru, who could dare poke his nose into his affairs ?"

"One day I happened to notice this palanquin, and so a great suspicion arose into my mind. One day I found this conveyance coming towards the *Chowk*,

and found who was in. Within two or three days I could make out that the occupier was not a female, but belonged to the opposite sex.

“And I found at the same time that the house he used to visit was occupied by an old crone whose avocation was to search after handsome youngmen, and to make friends with such people who put up at hotels. Needless to add that this made my suspicion all the greater. I engaged Dulali to keep a strict eye upon Gahar Jan and the old crone.

‘Lots of people come to town from far-off places with various objects, and the old procuress was always on the look out for handsome-looking youngmen, I was informed by Dulali that a stranger—a youngman, went with the old woman to her house, but never returned. And when a man hailing from a distant place disappears in such a mysterious manner, who would be at pains of tracing his whereabouts. Every one takes it for granted that the man must have gone elsewhere, and that was exactly the case with this missing youngman. He disappeared while at the procuress’ place, and nobody cared to know what has become of him.

“Dulali’s information made me more watchful still. A few days later I found the old woman inviting another man to her place, a short while after the palanquin in question came up, Gahar Jan, got out of it and went right in,—both Dulali and myself keeping watch. After a while both Gahar Jan and the youngman got into

Instantly I ordered Dulali to go to Gangiya's shop and to get ready the horse for me, while I followed the planquin, unnoticed by the bearers.

"The *Palki* arrived at a lonely spot on the bank of the river. There I found a pirate-boat ready for starting with about a hundred persons with oars in their hands. The bearers got into the boat with the *Palki*, and at once the boat started off; Dulali having brought my horse by this time, I mounted it and rode on along the coast following the boat."

When it was past midnight, the boat stopped at a lonely spot near Delhi. The bearers carried the conveyance towards the town. And what did I do? I tied up the horse to a tree and chased them from a considerable distance. There was not a human being on the way, as all the gates of the city were already closed. I saw from a distance the bearers carry the *Palki* near the city-gate and bring out the deadbody from within, quite naked, and placing it against the wall of the gate scamper off with the *Palki*."

Whatever I wanted to know, I found out, and, having satisfied myself, I gave up the chase. My horse having been jaded already, I walked on foot the whole night and returned to Agra on the following day. Coming here I found the pirate-boat mooring in its own place. Your Majesty can easily understand now that the mysterious murder of Delhi had come to my knowledge long ago."

When Behari Charan said his say neither the

Emperor nor the Empress could speak for a while. Both of them became dumb-founded at this un-dreamt-of scandal. The Emperor broke out at last,—

“Does any other person know about this?”

“No second soul is aware of this. Your Imperial Majesty may rest assured of that.”

“Not even Dulali?” was the question,

“No, Your Majesty. She knows nothing about these atrocious murders. I’ve told her nothing about these—”

“Then you assure me that you haven’t told this to any one else?”

“No—not even a syllable, and I do most solemnly assure Your Imperial Majesty.”

“Do not,—for goodness’ sake, do not. I had already proclaimed that a lac of rupees would be the reward of the person who could trace out these mysterious murders; and that promised sum is yours now. You would receive the order of the Court to that effect.”

Behari Charan thought within himself,—

“This is no reward—but rather the hush-money to gag the mouth of the person who would otherwise have divulged it.”

“Do you know any thing about Prince Parvesh’s murder?” was the next query.

“No, Your Majesty,—I’m utterly in the dark about this.”

“Go—you can now go wherever you like. I grant you free permission,” was the Imperial mandate.

Behari Charan took his departure with the usual salutations. Finding the attitude of the Emperor, Behari Charan bethought himself,—

“There would be a serious reverse at Delhi;—Masru's days are numbered.”

That very day he deposited the whole sum of money in the State Bank and fled from Delhi.

CHAPTER XLI.

THE TRAP.

It being the fourth day of the new moon and the time past ten, the eastern firmament was getting brighter and brighter and the lordly moon, throwing off its misty cloak of obscurity, burst out from amid the mass of dense clouds that had kept it hidden so long, and shooting forth its beams through the wide expanse, and attended by myriads of stars, shone with all its glory. Indeed, the sight was as grand as it was majestic. The struggle between the light and the shade in the obscure sky on the occasion was an imposing one.

The din and bustle of the Imperial City of Agra, getting thinner and thinner, is now hushed into perfect quietude and lulled into deadly silence, though oft and anon thin and vapoury sounds of music emitting from gay maullin singers and the outcries of the night-watches and the shouts of the towncrier, breaking the solemn stillness of the air, diffused far and wide.

It was about this time that a small boat, enveloped with the misty cloak of the night, was gliding quietly over the dark waters of the Jumna like a night-ranging bird.

In the outskirts of the city and on the bank of the river there were many a wild lonely grove and wood-

land, and within the enclosures of these woody retreats men of wealth and fashion building their summer-houses, without any regard to cost or expense, made them their rendezvous for the gratification of their sensual pleasures, and they became conspicuous as centers of all sorts of sin and crime.

The boat rolling on gently towards the back-gate of one of these pleasures haunts, stopped its course; and as soon as it was brought to a halt and its fastenings finished, a damsel of rather prepossessing appearance and attractive features, coming out of the cabin and taking a prospective view of the surroundings of the place with a hurried glance of her dark piercing eyes, whistled thrice with all her main and might.

"Where have we come?" shrieked a lady with a trembling voice from inside the boat, as she took a bird's eye view of the situation from one of the blinds of the cabin.

The first lady to whom the above question was put, without deigning to turn herself towards her interrogatress, answered rather in an indifferent manner, and laconically observed,—

"Why are you getting yourself alarmed for nothing, silly girl. Set your heart at ease, I know where we are come;—it is where we were bound for."

Addressing her companion with these vague words of consolation, she looked straight towards the garden-house in front of her, and again whistled thrice with as much force as it was possible for her to command.

Then three loud whistlings came out of a window of the upper-storey of the building, which was suddenly thrown open, and a person leaning over it responded to the signal and shut it again.

Nothing of all this escaped the observation of the lady inside the boat, and her heart began to throb violently ; the face of the man on the window, and of which she had caught but a faint glimpse through the open blind of the boat, made her cheeks pale and she said in a low trembling voice,—

“What does all this mean’ Jaun ?—Who was that man ;—whom did you signal to ?”

“Why are you getting nervous, my dear girl ? As long as I am with you, you needn’t be anxious at all,” saying this the first lady jumped out of the boat with a bound and getting down on the shore, walked on towards the garden with hurried steps. In the meanwhile a strange figure was seen advancing slowly toiling up the wild lonely shaggy bank towards the boat.

The lady on board felt a vague apprehension stealing over her at the sight and she glided herself from her seat, and looking up to Heaven and bursting out into tears, said,—

“God, forgive me for my yielding to the bent of my inclination and the artful sophistries of this wily Gaharjan. Believing in the sincerity of this siren, I left home and had fondly hoped to gratify my heart’s desires by having a look of him I adore. But, Lord, how sadly was I mistaken and how cruelly have all my

fond hopes been shattered to pieces. I have brought thy vengeance upon myself. Lord, forgive my trespasses, and deliver me from this scrape. For Thou only canst restore the sick and languid spirit to Thee and Thine!"

Having said her prayer to her Maker she thought herself thus :—

"Is this wretch, really, a woman after all, or a man in disguise, I have my misgivings on the point. One who can in one bound jump down to the shore from the boat with such ease,—oh, is it possible for a woman to do such a feat, surely she can never be a woman." And as she thought of this she became more and more agitated, her brain began to reel, her heart sank within her, and began to beat quicker, her mind became perturbed, her rosy cheeks turned pale with fear and her whole frame trembled.

Labouring under such distressing condition she again stretched her eyes towards the Great Author of her being for succour.

None knows if her appeal reached the footstool of the Throne of the Most High, but undoubtedly it was heard by some one else.

A small pinnace was sailing simultaneously with Gaharjan's boat on the other side of the river quite unperceived, and when Gaharjan's boat moored at the Ghat and she was whistling towards the edifice in front of her, this pinnace coming close to hers from the opposite direction at rapid course, proceeded a little further

through the darkness of the thick foliage of the woods and screened herself in the density of a spreading banyan tree of primeval growth, and a person having said something to the boatman, slowly and silently and with very great caution, got down from the boat and quite invisibly approached Gaharjan's boat.

A thick bush covered the place where Gaharjan's boat lay in anchor, and the stranger, taking advantage of the situation and with the greatest circumspection and wariness, descended into the water and proceeded towards the hinderpart of her boat, the helmsman of which, leaving his post, joined his comrades on the deck and was busy in arranging for a smoke.

The stranger, stooping low and keeping himself in touch with the boat, stood under the eaves and heard distinctly the ejaculation of the lady within the boat. His features were darkened as he heard her prayer : and grimming and grinding his teeth, he muttered to himself.—

“Oh, I never thought of this. I suspected some other devil was out on his wings for some other nefarious object. I knew for certain that, that devil of a man would return to Agra some day or other, but that he would return so soon,—oh, I could never for a moment think. He must have found a prey on his way back, and is trying to reap by it. To be sure, the man is enterprising enough, but I wonder whom he has made a victim of. But whoever she may be, she must be helped, and, I pawn my soul, I would rescue her at any cost and

at any hazard. Inscrutable are thy ways,—Oh ! Providence ! Oh, how fortunate was it that I left Agra and passed by this way.”

Having indulged in his reverie for a while he began to make a close examination of the boat and all its surroundings ; in the meanwhile two other men from his own vessel, stealthily coming close to him and addressing him in a very low tone of voice, said,

“We are come, Sir,”

“How many of you ?”

“Two of us.”

“That will do :—now let one of you go to the hinderpart of the boat and cut off the fastenings of the helm. Finish this quick, and do it as neatly and nicely, and as nimbly and quietly as you can. The man is enjoying a hearty pull of his *hookkah* along with the other crew of the vessel on the deck ; and when he returns to his seat and, to resume his work, lays hold of the helm, he will at once fall down into the water, taking his rudder with him.—By the way, have you brought the net ?”

“Yes ;—here it is.”

“Very good ; then let one of you take the net and lie in ambush there—I mean just in front of the yonder bush, and, when you hear the chirping of a partridge spread out your net on the land there—on the front part of the boat ; manage it with such skill and dexterity that *all the fishes* are taken in. Mind you must be on the alert ;—a moment’s delay may spoil the

whole game. So look sharp, my boys, and go your way."

"Don't be uneasy on that score, Master. We have all along been fishing in the water :—fishing on the land is a new game for us, and novelty never-falls to lend gusto and add relish to the sport," exclaimed one of the men, and they then both went away, each in his own way. Then with the man who made his way towards the boat to cut off the fastenings of the helm, went also the master ; and, stepping forward and standing close to the boat, he said in a very low tone of voice and in quite gentle and distinct accents.—

"Whoever may you be in the boat, take heart, and compose yourself. God's mercy is great, and here we are come to save you. Do not get down from the boat when Gaharjan asks you to do so, nor do you show your reluctance by saying "Nay." Only take time, procrastinate, and then, when you hear the chirping of a partridge, jump down into the water. I have my own men and my own raft to take you up and rescue you from the clutches of these wily creatures. Be not afraid of us ; we are sons to you, Madam, and you are mother to us."

The fastenings of the helm having been by this time let loose, they—both of the men, again receded their course through the water as imperceptibly as they moved forward and hid themselves among the thick foliage of the bush. The lady inside the boat was ill at ease so long, but hearing these words of consolation, her

countenance brightened up and she took heart again: thanking her God for this unexpected turn of affairs, she prepared herself for the emergency, just then Gaharjan accompanied by another person in black mask appeared on the scene and stood before the boat. Gaharjan addressing the lady within the boat said,—
“Oh, where are you, Gool?”

“Here I am—inside the boat. What news? Have you seen him?” replied the lady from inside the boat.

To this query Gaharjan laughed merrily and said,—

“Yes,—to be sure, I did ;—and if I had not been so very sanguine, my dear, I would not have taken all this trouble, nor put you into all this inconvenience and brought you here. For what earthly benefit would I derive to induce you to come hither.”

“Oh, where is he?”

“Inside the house ;—come down from the boat, and follow me quick.”

And the lady, coming out of her cabin, and casting an anxious look all around her, and stretching out her eyes towards the shore, startled and exclaimed,—

“Oh, how horribly dark it is—how dreadfully lovely the place looks to be, and how very lofty are the trunks of these woodland pines, how very prodigious is the magnitude of these eternal banians, and of what an immense bulk are these peepuls. Oh, I dare not—venture not to pass by the way. Indeed,

how can one make one's way through this gloomy, damp, impenetrable grove, where not even the lighting could ever rend a passage. Oh, I not only do not dare doing it, but the very thought chills my blood, and I shudder at the very idea of it."

Gaharjan by way of cajoling her said,—

"Ha ! Ha ! Ha !—What a silly girl you are, and how very funny of you to see a ghastly bug in each trembling leaf and whistling wind ; but you seem to forget that sounds do no harm ; and the sounds of the trembling leaf and the whistling wind you hear, as ghastly bug does rear your hair on end, yet both do strive to feign their fearfulness !—but upon experience, the horrors—the uncouth monsters, you see in your fancy and imagine to hear,—all these bugs grow familiar and easy to you as a familiar or a vampire. There is a very fine passage all through the way, and my lord has laid a marble pavement from hence to the mansion gate yonder, and planted by its sides rows of scented arbours and odoriferous bowers, and sweet-smelling orchards of rare varieties. Oh, it is always a pleasure to walk through this delightful walk, and, I assure you, my dear, you will enjoy it very much as we walk along."

"No, my dear, I fear, I shan't be able to pass through this unknown track and its frightful surroundings in such horrid darkness. Oh, I am surprised with an uncouth fear ; a chilling sweat overruns my trem-

ling joints ; my heart suspects something more than mine eye can see," replied the lady.

"Ha ! Ha ! Ha !—What are you afraid of ? We are two here to escort you safe ; you will remain in the middle, and each of us will serve you as your body-guards,—one as an advance, and the other as a rear-guard."

The lady, addressed to, feigning as if she had not noticed the man who was in company of Gaharjan before, said with a sudden start.—

"Oh, who is he,—a ghost or a human being ?"

Gaharjan laughed outright and said,—

"Come out and see for yourself whether a ghost or a human being. He is a *Sidi*, and a trusted one too. My Lord has sent his faithful eunuch to escort you to his place."

The lady, now turning towards him, said,—

"Oh, what a wonderful and ingenuous man he must be to depute his eunuch to receive and welcome me ! Ah, it bodes no good : for a eunuch is at all events not a very happy augury to start with,—a very ill omen, indeed, to come across at the start."

"A superstitious prejudice of the *Kafir* Hindus," exclaimed Gaharjan reproachfully. We faithful followers of the One True Prophet pin not our faith on such absurd beliefs, nor do we give any credence to the prognostication of auguries :—and omens, good or bad, have neither any weight, nor carry any favour, with us. On the contrary, we know it as a matter of fact that in

affairs like these, *Sidis* or eunuchs are not only very helpful, but simply indispensable."

"I too come from a Hindu stock ;—my grandfather was a Hindu ;—and how can I forego these superstitious ideas in a generation or two, my dear," rejoined the lady on board.

"Very good, you are welcome to have your own presentiments. Now, come down quick ; no use of wasting time by idle talk," said Gaharjan haughtily.

"No, dear, no. Please excuse me, I shan't be able to make my way in such dense darkness through this unknown track in the blessed company of your grim-visaged Ethiopian guide. No, my dear, no ; I dare not do it," exclaimed the lady in a firm tone of voice.

"Then why did you venture yourself in such an enterprise, and suffer yourself to be entangled in the meshes of a love affair. A votaress of Cupid should be prepared for any hazard, for any difficulty, and to undergo any trouble or inconvenience. No rose without thorns," replied Gaharjan getting exasperated.

"Oh, how depraved you must be to indulge in such flippancy and give expression to such contemptuous terms before these menials here. Have you no sense of decency ? I wonder how you could make use of such vile expressions—such filthy language. In sooth, it is not only provoking, but nauseating in the extreme, and makes me quite sick," interjected the lady.

Then the attendant, dressed in the garb of a eunuch, beckoning to Gaharjan in a mysterious way with

his fingers and slyly passing her body, whispered something into her ears.

Gaharjan, taking the hint, said in a jocular vein,—

“Dear, what’s the good of trying our patience in the horrid darkness of this dense wood? The dark night alone is sufficient to exasperate us, and then the bites of these gnats are more than human endurance; and we have all along been suffering from all these torments, while you, comfortably ensconced in your cabin, have begun wrangling. No use of wasting time.”

The lady, feigning to be really annoyed, said,—

“This is all your own seeking. I haven’t brought this on you, and surely I am no way to be blamed for it. It is all due to your own folly, to your own rashness. Oh, what a funny creature he must be to send out a black Ethiopian dressed in all black in this dark—horribly dark, night to escort me through an unknown lonely track, screened with the spreading branches of lofty trees and the thick bushes of a dense forest without a light to guide! No, my dear, no,—I tell you frankly, I won’t—nay, I dare not—I venture not, to stir out in this horrid darkness without a light.”

Gaharjan was about to say something in reply but the eunuch again interrupting signalled her in her own mysterious way, and catching the hint, she burst out,—“Oh, how very troublesome,” and addressing the crew on board, exclaimed,—

“You are four here. Now let two of you wait on

board, and let the other two run out and fetch a light from the mansion there." At this two of the boatmen got down from the boat and ran with full speed towards the mansion, and in a moment disappeared from view and melted themselves in the darkness.

Gaharjan, again addressing the lady on board, said,—

"Are you satisfied, my dear? Pray, come down now, and save us for goodness' sake ;—we are dying here of the bites of the gnats."

The lady in question, coming out of the cabin, stood at one end of the deck of the boat and bursting out in a loud laughter said in a merry vein,—

"Oh,—how very good of you, my dear! You want to make me a participator of your blessed enjoyment. What a kind friend you must be, and I thank you heartily for your kind offer, but, my dear, I do not envy your lot,—I do not want to enjoy the bites of those pretty gnats there, and deprived you of the luxury of their blessed stings. You are welcome to enjoy them freely, and to your heart's content."

"If you would only agree, my dear, I'll take you in my arms and walk on, and by that time the light would come," rejoined Gaharjan, more in seriousness than in jest, though she expressed herself in a light vein.

"Pray, tell me ; my dear, can the thirst for milk be satiated with whey? Had you been one of the sterner sex, I could have rather consoled myself by making a hobson's choice ; but, as it is, how is it possible? Both

of us belong to the same order of creation, and there is neither any novelty nor satiety," replied the lady in the same merry vein.

"Come down and see for yourself ;—if you be not satisfied why you have got your own legs to carry you off, and by that time the light would come."

The lady said,—“Well, let an experiment be made—it is hard to resist such a temptation ;—oh, you would make me get down.” Saying this, she got up on the top of the boat ; but casting her eyes downwards once, she at once re-traced her steps and said,—“Oh, it is too high,—how shall I get down. Indeed,—I am getting suspicious about your sex. Oh, how could you get down from such a height. In fact, you surprise, nay, startle, me.

Gaharjan then laughed loudly and said,—

“Well, why don't you then get your suspicions removed. Come, let me take you in my arms and jump down with you.” With this, she advanced a step or two towards the boat ; but just then, a furious roar of some two or three tigers issued simultaneously from the adjoining thick bush.

“O-h-t-h-e !—t-i-g-e-r-s,” exclaimed Gaharjan, and she in an instant leaped backwards to some cubits' length ; her whole frame shivered, and she cast her eyes all around her in great terror. And the lady, in the twinkling of an eye, coming backwards stood ready at one end of the boat, while the crew dropped down their

hobble-bobbles, and, horror-struck, stood stupefied and looked askance towards the bush.

Hearken! The fearful roar rose again—and this time the roar was much more furious than before—and filled the entire space;—the bush too at the same time began to shake a little.

The man in black, introduced as an eunuch, stood all along behind Gaharjan and was casting anxious looks all around. But as soon as he heard the thundering roars of the tigers and saw the bush shake, he fled towards the mansion, more dead than alive, quaking with fear and crying, --“O-h,—t-h-e—t-i-g-e-r-s!” “O-h,—t-h-e-t-i-g-e-r-s!” Gaharjan had no time to look behind, and bidding the crew to weigh anchor, disappeared.

On the other hand, one of the crew cutting off the fastenings of the boat, let it go, while the other with a terrific yell jumped over the top of the boat, and going to his post, held the helm with all his might, and main; but the boat whirling came with a rush at once to the middle of the river and fell before the full current. And the helmsman, while trying to control the boat with his whirling-wheel, fell into the river with his apparatus;—and just then the loud tone of a partridge was heard across the river, and the lady, without taking any time for reflection at once jumped down into the river, while her boat began to whirl in the river, as it were, in a whirlpool.

As soon as the lady jumped down in the river, two men catching her took her up in their arms, and carried

her into their own light boat, while the other boat passed off to a great distance. All these happened in so quick succession that they all seemed to the lady as if she was dreaming a dream, or witnessing a juggler's conjuring trick. In the meantime the light boat careering with lightning movement vanished.

When she was composed a little, some one, handing her a cloth, said.—

"*Ma* ; change your wet cloth ;—don't feel shy,—I am your son,—Behari Charan. That I could rescue you from the wiles of that vile wretch—that despicable creature—that abominable character—that devil of a man in a woman's garb, Gaharjan by name, is a sufficient reward for me. Thank God that you have been saved, and pray tell me where to reach you."

CHAPTER XLII.

THE PRISONER.

After having learnt from Behari Charan all the facts relating to the mysterious murders of the *Begum Mahal*, His Imperial Majesty asked him, if any one else knew anything about the same, his courage failed him, and he grew nervous, and thought his doom was sealed ;—and giving way to self-reflection, said he to himself,—“Oh, the freaks of fickle Fortune ! Oh, the oddities of the royal countenances !

The reason was not far to seek. “A forethought spares many an afterthought” is the wisdom of life, and since dead men carry no tales, the wily Gaharjan and his tribe deemed it not only prudent but expedient to make a short work of those unwary travellers that they could hit upon at the public inn ; and so they never allowed those helpless youths, they could peradventure inveigle and foist in the *Begum Mahal* at night-fall, to wake up and see the light of the morning sun ; and thus the matter was hushed up, and hushed up, to all intents and purposes, for ever.

But the fact of Behari Charan’s coming to know all about the mysteries of the forbidden ground of the *Begum Mahal* had a deep significance, and the matter assumed a serious aspect ;—and surely the possession of such a dead secret on the part of an outsider, was to

say the least. most undesirable, and who knows how it would fare with poor Behari Charan, or whither his fate would lead him. No wonder, therefore, if with all these thoughts hovering over him, his heart would for a moment turn within him, and he would feel ill at ease.

But then, Behari Charan was not a man of the average run;—his mind was cast in a different mould. And he soon got the better of his ill-humour, and prepared himself to face the worst with a cheerful spirit, and to meet his doom without a sad remorse.

“Be just, and fear not to speak the truth, serve the master, and be dutiful to the king,” were the golden precepts of his life, and if in scrupulously observing these maxims of life, he perchance brings any misery on himself, why, he has the approbation of his own conscience which, next to his Maker’s, he only cares for; and he would neither be sad, nor be the least sorry nor the least repentant, should the worse come to the worst. Such was the train of Behari Charan’s thoughts at the moment when he, looking straight in the face of the Emperor, said in a most emphatic manner, and dignified tone, but with respectful submission,—

“No, My Lord, I assure you most solemnly, not a soul knows anything about these horrible and mysterious murders,” and awaited His Majesty’s fiat with crossed arms.

But howsoever queer it may seem to be, yet non-the-less true that those whom Providence has placed as rulers of mankind, and vested with authority and

endowed with powers for good or evil—to wield at will their royal sceptre, to lead or send forth armies through unknown tracts and foreign regions, to lay seige to citadels and fortresses and conquer countries, to found empires. establish government and order restore peace and tranquillity, make laws, and scatter blessings all over the Earth ;—aye, the impress of the Maker is imprinted deep on whose kingly brow, whatever they may or may not be,—oh, surely, they are quite a different class of beings, and belong to a separate order of creation ;—and the difference betwixt those divine personages and us—poor erring mortals, is as well-marked as is the order between man—the lord of creation and the dumb driven cattle, or his beasts of burden ;—yea, between the animal and the vegetable kingdoms.

“t was virtue only, or in arts or arms,
 Diffusing blessing, or averting harms,
 The same which in a sire the sons obey’d,
 A prince the father of a people made.”

And men of all rank and position, of all calling and station in life, of all leaning and persuasion, comprising the great mass of humanity, regarding

“The king becoming graces,
 As Justice, verity, temp’rance, stableness,
 Bounty, persev’rance, mercy, lowliness,
 Devotion, patience, courage, fortitude,”

bend down their knees, bow down their heads and pay homage to their gracious majestics ; and kings they

make Gods," and worship their illustrious personalities as substitutes of the Great King of kings.

Indeed, kings shine with divine graces and shed their hallowed lustre on the earth and protect the world.

Truth is truth and not a geographical expression; latitude and longitude are not its boundary lines. "There is no Religion higher than Truth," says the ancient Hindu maxim; striking the same chord the Grecian Sage sings in chorus, "Truth is the body of God and Light is its shadow." What is true, is universally true, is true for every clime and true for all times. And harping his tune on the kingly virtues, a modern sage observes,

"The German name for prince is First, in English First, he who is always to the fore, he who courts the place of danger, the first place in fight, the last in flight, such a first is a true prince, a real *Raja*, if *Raja* also like *Rex*, meant originally the steersman, the man at the helm."

No wonder, therefore, if His Majesty could, with his intuitive faculty, his own kingly instinct dive deep into the matter and pry into the bottom of things and, penetrating into the secret spring of the human heart, would, like a true seer, read right the thoughts and sentiments which alternately past across the mind of poor Behari Charan at the time and swelled his breast and both the Emperor and his Consort were very well-pleased with the devotion, the steadfastness, the honest simplicity, the unswerving loyalty, the keen sense of

duty, of that gapper who had neither an ancestry to boast, nor any escutcheon to flourish, much less had he any pretension to learning or scholarship to commend; and both of them were firmly convinced and perfectly satisfied in their own minds that any secret coming to his knowledge would never be divulged by him, nor would he ever betray any confidence reposed in him; and so the mystery of the *Begum Mahal* was quite safe with him. "Oh, indeed, he was not born," mused the Emperor, "to lead a subject life, each action of his bearing in it majesty, such a kingly entertainment, such a kingly magnificence, such a kingly heart of enterprizes," and why should they then fall short of their own kingly duties and be wanting in their princely appreciation of such sterling qualities of the head and the heart, and fail to give effect to their recognition of such honesty and sincerity, of such probity and integrity, of such nobility and magnanimity, of such goodness and excellence, of such principle and character, of such talent and art; of such skill and ingenuity, of such worth and eminence; and last, though not least, of such virtue and grace; in a public manner, and withhold from him their royal bounty by such an endowment on him as would be befitting to their kingly munificence.

The disclosure of a mystery like that of the *Begum Mahal*, and the implication of persons in the complete possession of the ears of the sovereigns, like the Imperial Guard of the *Noor Mahal*—the eunuch Masru and his creature Gaharjan, in the Royal presence, would surely

and certainly have cost any man his neck, but in the case of *Khiradmand* Behari Charan, it was ordained otherwise, and it really proved to him, as it were, a veritable source of blessing. Having been fortunate enough to ingratiate himself into the good graces of Their Majesties and win their implicit confidence, he became, in fact, the most enviable favourite of the fortunate few of Royal favourites.

And as for Behari Charan, poor man considered himself supremely blessed to see that his motives had not been misconstrued ;—the hopes and ardours, the trials and struggles of his life, which had now crowded upon his mind, had at last culminated in success, and he was on the fair way of reaching his goal.

And indulging in his own ruminations, said he to himself,—

“But, oh, deluded mortal, know this for thyself that
‘Fortune, that arrant whore,

Ne'er turns the key to th' poor' ;—
and that

‘All nature is but art, unknown to thee ;
All chance direction, which thou canst not see ;’—
and that the course of fortune is ever fickle as the fickle sex whom we in vain pursue, but who change the constant lover for the new ; and, as it has been well said, ‘what she liked one day, she disliked another.’

‘But random chance, or wilful fate,
Guides the shaft from Cupid's bow.’

For after all,—

‘What it is to love.’

—it is to be made all of sighs and tears ;

It is to be made all of faith and service ;

It is to be all made of fantasy,

All made of passion, and all made of wishes ;

All adoration, duty, and obedience ;

All humbleness, all patience, all impatience.

All purity, all trial, all observance.’

But, hark, Behari Charan.

‘I am a soldier, and unapt to weep,

or to exclaim on fortune’s fickleness,’

‘Do not now,

Like a young wasteful heir, mortgage the hopes

Of godlike majesty on bankrupt terms.

To arise a present power that’s fickle held

By the frail tenure of the people’s will.’

Remember,

“Our duty of preparation contained in this one word, try or examine, being after the manner of mysteries, mysteriously and secretly described, there is reason to believe that there is in it very much duty.’ ‘And my purpose is to gather together into one union all those several portions of truth, and differing apprehensions of mysteriousness.’ For they can judge as fitly of Masru and his vile accomplice, as I can of those mysteries ‘which Heaven will not have earth to know.’ And this I have done ; and they say, ‘Trust no future however pleasant ;—and so, my friend, pin not thy faith in

kingly beneficence or on imperial favours, or be seduced by the seductive charms of royal smile.

And the sages of yore in laying down the Wisdom of Life have, said in no equivocal terms that royal favours are as uncertain as is the course of Love.

And if any marvel how a thing, in itself so weak, could import any great danger, they must consider not so much how small the spark is that fitteth up, as how apt things about it are to take fire.

But,

'I look'd upon her with a soldier's eye
That lik'd but had a rougher task in hand,
Than to drive liking to the name of love.'

For to meddle in state affairs, or worse still, to identify oneself with one party or another in the body politic, was to play with fire, when the Royal ire would descend on one's head like a bolt in the blue in a cloudless sky, no one knows.' "

Having thus reasoned within himself for some time, Behari Charan made up his mind to leave the city for good ; and the night he got his final leave from the Emperor and the Empress, he passed in a wakeful state, and with throbbing agony he got up early in the morning ; and, after having finished his morning toilet and said his prayer, he set out for the Set Bank to deposit his money in ;—and, having done so, he never turned his back towards the city, but on he went, not knowing where he was going or whither he was to go ;—and his route lay through the riverside. It chanced however, that some

fishermen, who were out afishing, and who knew him very well, and with whom he was not only very popular, but who, in fact, looked upon him as their patron saint, saw him pass along the strand road, and after the first greetings were exchanged, they made him to get on their sailing craft and promised to reach him anywhere he liked ;—and what happened in the *interim*, our readers are well aware of.

But although Behari Charan left Delhi once for all, yet the fire he had kindled, was not extinguished. It remained smouldering in the heart of Their Majesties, and it disturbed their peace of mind, and they became distracted and dejected in spirit.

They could easily have executed Masru then and there and satisfied their splee. For the public laws were not appilcable to the domestic laws of the Emperor or the Empress. Not even a sham of a trial by a public officer of a real or a supposed culprit was necessary to procure the execution. The faintest whisper, the slightest inkling, nay, even an ogling of the eye from the Empress, would at once have been sufficient to see the work got through, and not even a whisper, much less a murmur would have been heard outside the walls of the *Begum Mahal*. For to do so was to forfeit one's life, and even the *Badshah* himself would not have dared to run counter to her wishes, had he even been inclined to grant a reprieve. But then it would have been impolitic to do so, and so beneath a pleasant exterior, Their Majesties had a very uncomfortable time to pass

off and very provoking surroundings to fight shy of. And so both the Emperor and the Empress had no other alternative but patiently to submit to the inevitable and forbear from taking any precipitous action in the matter.

Gaharjan, his cohort and invaluable accomplice in all villainous deeds of darkness and atrocity, was still at large ; and, if perchance, he gets the scent of Masru's meeting with the final retribution of justice,—were that to overtake him,—then that imp of a man would make himself scarce, and cheat justice of its dues. And so patiently they waited for the arrival of that black sheep of the fold, and kept a strict watch over the movements of Masru. Nor had they to wait long in the painful suspense. For, as Behari Charan had very well foretold, to leave the fountain of pleasure like that of the *Begum Mahal* behind one's back, for one who had tasted it once to one's full satiety especially by one of the cast of Gaharjan, was a feat more than the resisting force of nature of weak man and erring humanity. And Gaharjan was sure to turn up some day or other to take his place in the *Begum Mahal*. For scarcely had one week passed when Gaharjan made his appearance in the Imperial Seraglio, and joined his chief, the redoubtable Masru—the Captain-General of Iniquity.

The mystery of the *Begum Mahal* was kept a dead secret from the royal household—not even a soul knew anything about, nor got any scent of this affair. And so

those hell-hounds, Masru and his accomplice, were quite off their guard and perfectly at their ease ; and being thus altogether unconscious of the thick dark clouds hanging over their head, those foul fiends were concocting together with their wonted wantonness and usual adroitness their strategic manoeuvres for fresh captures and new conquests ;—when, lo, horror upon horror, the Aid-de-camp-General of His Imperial Majesty with a few of his retainers suddenly appeared in the scene and fastened them with iron chains scarcely before they could recover from their first shock and realize their situation :—so sudden, so swift it was that they felt as if some deadly serpent was hissing at night with its outstretched hood and fang, ready to suck the vital blood out of them when they saw nothing before, and thought the place quite safe ;—or as if a thunderbolt fell over their head from a serene sky ;—or as if a spectre had suddenly risen up before them :—oh, so sudden, so unexpected, and so rapid, it was.

And they stood in awful silence, their heart turned within them, and their knees smote together, while a ghastly expression swept over their features. They uttered not a word, but like a dumb statue looked with vacant eyes and gazed wildly over the scene in perfect bewilderment, and scarcely believing their own eyes, or the state they were placed in. At last, after a while, when they had recovered a little and realized their position, their first impulse was to regain their liberty ;—and of this, Masru was the leader. But,

despite all his supreme efforts, all his muscular force and physical endurances, the chains were too strong for him, and he felt exhausted and sank back in a kind of frenzy ; and, with outraged feelings and with crimson eyes,—and gnashing his teeth and assuming a threatening attitude, he addressed the Aid-de-camp-General of his Majesty in a thundering tone of voice and exclaimed,—

“And thou Faiji—darest thou to raise thy accursed fingers against me, to capture me ! Dost thou not know that if I like I can—”

But before he could finish his sentence, Faiji—for that was the name of the Aid-de-camp-General of His Majesty—hustled down and contemptuously replied,—

“Physician heal thyself, and then do thou thy worst to me if thou like.”

And then turning to his own attendants, he said,—

“Now, Guards, remove the prisoners to the darkest dungeon of the palace, and stand no ceremony with them. Secure them fast, and let them wait their fate in the dungeon.”

Away went he, and the force dragged the prisoners to their cell, and it required no foresight to read what fate awaited them in the near future. But we leave the prisoners here to conjecture their own fate.

CHAPTER XLIII.

THOU SHALT REAP AS THOU HAST SOWN.

The whole town was stirred up to its inmost depth, and consternation reigned supreme all over the imperial city. As a bolt from the blue takes the people by surprise, so the death-warrant of Musru, the chief eunuch of the Imperial Seraglio, and of Gaharjan, the chamber-maid of the Empress, spread like wild fire and filled every mind with surprise, horror and dismay.

Such sentences were not quite a new thing;—but still there was something inexplicable in it which kindled the curiosity of both men and women, the young and the old. Like all other trials of the *Begum Mahal*, it also remained a mystery which no body could unravel. But this much they realised that the chief eunuch Masru and Gaharjan, the Chamber-Maid of the Empress, were to be taken to the crematorium ground early next morning, and there they would be fed by ferocious hounds and tortured to death.

Of all criminal sentences during the Mogul rule, this was the most torturous; and save and beyond the worst of criminals such sentences were seldom passed. And every one knew that the crime of the party on whom such sentences were passed, had a hideousness of its own, and which knew no compromise. And naturally enough when they could hear of any such sentences, their hearts beat quicker.

And so, they could easily understand, when they

heard Masru and Gaharjan's fate, that they were the worst of felons and devils incarnate. And every one was anxious to witness the scene.

Long before the early hours of dawn, the entire space of land known as the place of all execution, was thronged with eager spectators ;—and peoples of all sexes, of all castes, of all religions, of all persuasions, of all ages, and of all denominations, from all parts of the city and its environs, assembled there to witness the horrible scene. They were all filled with one eager curiosity to have a look of those felons on whom such torturous sentence was passed, and how they suffer. Morbid curiosity is the worst freak of human nature, and it is certainly more than human to subdue the temptation of gratifying this morbid curiosity, when such an opportunity presents itself. No wonder, therefore, that people would leave their home and hearth, their business and occupation, and even their own dear little ones behind them, to gratify their inhuman brutal passion—for morbid curiosity is nothing but a base passion, a passing frenzy, an unending failing of weak human nature. And so it actually came to pass. Nor was this all. Even the upper tens.—the aristocrats, the nobles, and the grandees, the Amirs and the Omraos of the city,—drove there. as if to witness some pageantry, some magnificence, some public spectacle which seldom fall to the lot of humanity to witness. Even the weak and the infirm, the old depending on his staff, the lame walking on his crutch, the child following

on the heels of its mother, the maiden seizing the apron of the matron, ran in one leg, so to say, to the place to secure a standing accomodation.

Two large holes were dug in the middle of the place of execution. Beside these holes, were standing public executioners—too fierce to look at; and they held in their hands the chains of still more ferocious black hounds. Oh; the scene was one of horror and terror—too horrid to gaze at—too terrifying to behold—too awe-inspiring to congeal the vital fluid—too powerful to suspend the action of the heart and deaden the activities of the body and the soul.

In fact, there was no end of congregation, and the place presented a spectacle of one vast ocean of human heads with swelling surges and undulating waves rolling up and down in agitated manner and in a state of violent commotion;—mothers missing their dear little sucklings, infants and babies falling down from the arms of their mothers, children losing the hold of their parents, the old and the infirm thrust away from their guides or their staffs rent asunder;—oh, all these were sights too tender to kindle the best susceptibilities of the human breast—too holy to awaken the innate sanctity of the soul. Oh, what a world of vast contrast it is! Though the dogs—those ferocious blood-sucking hounds, were all strongly chained in strong fetters and held, or rather led, by equally powerful *Doorias* (hound-keepers), yet the ferocious hellish animals—demoniac beast, became so deeply agitated at the sight

of the vast crowd that they grew impatient and showed every moment symptoms of blood-thirstiness by breaking loose of their chains and fetters and falling upon the crowd to make a carnival feast of the human flesh to their full satiety. Now all of a sudden the whole plain became greatly stirred up—aye, like a storm in an ocean,—breaking the awful silence of the place, there arose a piercing cry rending asunder the sky with the words;—“Lo, there,—on that side,—there come they !” and all the eyes of the vast crowd were at once drawn, as if by a magic pull, towards that direction ;—and every one saw that surrounded by a host of armed soldiers and mounted guards with drawn sabres, two human beings,—dressed in black cloaks from head to feet, and fettered and chained in the waist ; and led by a number of musketeers,—moving in slow and measured steps were advancing to the central point.

To have a look of those two figures became the one uncontrolling passion of that vast assembly, and every one did one's best, and tried one's worst, to elbow one's way and make a passage for oneself ; each one helped the other, with all the might that one could command, to create a disturbance ; and now a tumult, far out-bidding the roars of a stormy sea or a tumultuous ocean, filled the entire space ; and the efforts—the supreme efforts of the armed soldiers and the mounted guards—were unavailing to keep them under control. And, the loud howling and wild growling with which

they rent the air made the heart of the spectators dry, awe struck, stupefied and benumbed, and they all stood like so many statues and mummies. But in the midst of all this confusion,—all this horror—all this terror,—there was one consolation to keep the public in spirit. Thousands of sentinels, hundreds of mounted guards, armed with thunder and clad with steel, were stationed to maintain peace—to keep everything in order—and to watch public safety.

Ultimately they were led to the spot where they were to meet their doom, and made to stand side by side. Oh, what a dismal picture did they present to the human sight;—they were all trembling, their lips were quivering, their eyes were sunk in their sockets, their cheeks were turned pale in horror, their foreheads were brow-beaten and thick wrinkles cast their dye there, their mouths were parched, tears were dried up from off their eyes, their heads hung low, and they could hardly maintain an upright position. Oh, the scene was too horrid to make one's blood run cold—too dreadful to make their hairs stand on end,—oh, indeed, one of deep pathos and sincere commiseration!

The secret of this was that lest the culprits, put *in extremes*, open their mouths, and proclaim the real truth of their falling under the ire of Their Imperial Majesties;—and Gaharjan discloses his identity and unfolds the story of his connexion with the *Begum Mahal* as the waiting maid of the Empress, and lets out every thing mysterious connected therewith, it was thought expedient to excite the public mind and let them run riot and gratify their spleen and thereby to silence the miscreants for ever. But, strange to say, far from touching on the fine sensibilities of the human soul, it stirred up the very worst passions of human nature and the vast crowd that assembled there on the occasion grew exas-

perated, and became very turbulent to have a fling at those two human beings, fettered in irons and bound in chains, and one of them, to all outward appearances, was a woman, or at least wearing the garb of a woman,—that it proved rather too tough for the soldiers, who were marshalled in a circle around them, to check the rowdies who were running wild and revelling in wantonness, and every one lifted up the finger of scorn, and would spit on their mouths, if nothing worse ; and it seemed as if the officers in attendance would perfectly acquiesce in their deeds of violence.

Oh, if the public were to know that a man,—a rake, a lewd person, a libertine, a debauch, a notorious character, like one of the culprits in the disguise of a woman, was living under the roof of the Imperial Seraglio and attending on Her Majesty as her Chambermaid for so long a time, and no one knew anything about it,—what a shameful disclosure it would be ;—oh, indeed, it would be too ignominious a story. too humiliating a revelation, and too revolting for Their Majesties to allow it to come out—to slip out of those two felons and spread from lip to lip, and make it a by-word—a scandal for vulgar enjoyment, and to serve as a hot seasoned dish for pampering loose appetite.

To be forewarned is to be forearmed. And, like a true prophet, the Emperor took due precautions to curb the speech of those two felons and not to allow them a moment's respite to open their mouths. And it actually came to pass in that field of execution. Growing desperate and boiling with rage, their hearts swelled to unloose their tongue ;—but, alas, neither Gaharjan, nor his comrade, found an opportunity to do so, and gratify their vengeance. And what followed is a scene too horrid to be depicted in words ;—and so we would leave our readers here to indulge in their own conclusion.

CHAPTER XLIV.

SHAH JEHAN.

The Emperor (Jehangir) is dead now. Prince Khurum has already been proclaimed as Emperor of Delhi under the name of Shah Jehan. All the Generals, Chiefs and Ministerial and other Officers of Agra have gone to Mewar and acknowledged him as their liege lord—their *Badsha*. The new Emperor, escorted both in the front and in the rear, by his vassals and ministers—Rajput Princes and Mogul Chieftains, and a retinue of soldiers, is coming towards Agra with thousands of horse and elephant, guards with great pomp and eclat ;—the splendour of which, oh, no one then born has ever witnessed.

The Emperor has been close to Agra. In order to have a look of the new Emperor, persons of all ages—both male and female, have taken their stand on either side of the road, leaving aside their own work ;—and there was not an inch of ground anywhere, either on the tops and terraces, in the windows and balconies, of houses ;—and even the trees on the roadsides were thronged with people and some of them gave way beneath the weight of persons climbing thereon. Roads extending over hundreds of miles from town were thronged with spectators ; and both sides were lined by armed soldiers.

and mounted guards ;—while their Generals gorgeously dressed kept on patrolling ; the whole road looked gay with festoons of flowers and motley-cloured flags ; at times the *Nahavats* and the *Rasunchoukis* discoursed sweet music. In order to shower flowers upon His Imperial Majesty, the ladies, veiled, were awaiting the arrival of the Emperor with flower-trays in their hands. In fact, the whole of Agra presented a gala look and wore a festive appearance and the citizens were filled with joy and delight and words of welcome and hymns of praise were chanted in honour of the Emperor from time to time and rent the sky.

Gradually the Emperor came nearer and nearer. There was a universal stir all over, with a regular jostling all the way except on a certain spot. Far in an obscure part of the road, there was seated on a tiger-skin in a bedstead an old *Sannyasin* leaning against a bolster, while seated by his side, a *Sannyasini* of exquisite charms and divine grace, was fanning him gently with her lovely hand, Behind them there were standing another couple of hermits, male and female, with a girl seated at their feet on the ground. By the side of this girl an old dame was sitting. Amidst all this pomp and pageantry this sight seemed really sublime and sweet ; it is, therefore, that the vast crowd that assembled there, keeping themselves at a respectful, distance longed to look upon the scene with wistful eyes ; and no body dared to approach these holy persons ; on the contrary, every one looked upon them with feelings

of deep piety and sincere regard ;—and gazed at them with truly bewildered eyes, not excluding the soldiers who also kept themselves aloof from them.

First came the mace-bearers followed by hundreds of drummers who simply stirred the whole universe. The cavalry, mounting on their noble steeds, passed in procession, the heralds came next, proclaiming the glory of the Emperor, and to which the vast populace joined. All this pomp and pageantry was simply grand and beyond description.

The elephants advanced in numbers arrayed in various dresses set with precious stones. The elephant-mounted officials showered with both hands gold coins as they passed through the crowd, when at last the mammoth elephant of the Emperor came into sight, dressed in the Imperial robe. His Majesty was seated on the gold-*howdah*, a Sovereign Prince holding the golden umbrella over his head. At the sight of the Emperor all Agra was agitated with the sound of hurrah, and was filled an over with shouts of exultation and acclamation,

As the mammoth elephant came up to the old *Sannyasin*, the huge animal stopped at once in a kneeling posture, and outright the Emperor jumped down from the *howdah* at which the awful uproar was calmed in the twinkling of an eye, there being a pin drop silence all over. People held their breath and anxiously fixed their eyes wide open upon the Emperor to see what His Majesty was about to do.

In hot haste the Emperor stepped up to the holy man who tried to pay his homage by standing up, but he was prevented from doing so. The Emperor took his hand and kissed it with due respect and every one felt astonished to find that the Emperor bowed down to the holy couple and after the quaint old Hindu fashion took the dust of their sacred feet. This un-dreamt of procedure on the part of the Emperor made the old hermit mute, and tears welled out of his eyes in torrents, while, the *Sannyasini* exclaimed,—

“May you live long, my child, and have the well-being of your people always before your eyes.”

Then the Emperor reverentially accosting the ascetic-dressed Behari Charan said,—

“You shouldn’t bow to me,” and hugged him warmly,

Then holding Shyama’s mother by the hand observed.—

“Could Khurum have ever been ascended to the Imperial Throne—could Shajehan have ever assumed the sovereignty of the Empire and proclaimed Emperor of Delhi, without you, Madam.”

At this remark of the Emperor drops of tears streamed down Hamida’s eyes—for that was the name of the old woman, her alternative names being Gangiya and Shyama’s mother.

The Emperor now took off the precious necklace from his own neck ; and, having put it on Dulali’s, said with a graceful smile,—

"The charge of finding out a worthy mate for you rests with me, my dear."

He then threw lots of gold coins into the lap of Dayamayi, who was seated beside Dulali, saying,—

"These will come to your use in time."

The Emperor again turning his eyes towards the old hermit said.—

"Brotner, stay here a few days more. We will meet again. Now good bye."

With these words he mounted his elephant. Shouts of joy agitated the whole universe again and people became maddened with joy and delight at the Emperor's actions.

The Emperor advanced, followed by innumerable elephants, soldiers and bands of music. Heralds began to proclaim his glory again, but people could not make out what it meant; only this much was evident that the Empress Mam Taj Mahal would be in their midst ere long.

The gold *Tanjam* in which Her Imperial Majesty was seated came into sight. To the surprise of all the conveyance was put down before the aforesaid holy man. Dressed in the most precious garb and jewels, Lulia got out of the conveyance and went up to the holy man and her own mother, adoring their sacred feet. Millions of voices shouted out,—

"Victory to the Empress Taj Mahal."

With a tender kiss to Dulali and salutation to

Behari Charan and his wife Gangiya, the Empress got into the *Tanjam* saying—"—

"We will meet again, *Ma.*"

At this time gold coins began to be scattered all around, like showers of rain from the elephants behind. From that day the Empress Taj-Mahal began to be regarded by the people of Agra as their own. The Empress left the place after a while, followed by millions of elephants and horses. Oh, this was indeed, a spectacle quite new, a sight truly novel and unique.

As soon as the Imperial Cavalry entered the Fort sweet music began to sound all around. All Agra became mad with joy. Millions of people made for the town and the Fort, but no body cared to turn their course towards where the holy people were seated. Every one made a reverential bow to them from a considerable distance. When the crowd dispersed, the *Sannyasi* took the holy man to a garden house close by and it was with the intention of visiting their Imperial Majesties that they were staying in this house.

We have nothing more to add. The Empress—a jungle flower—withered away when she came in contact with the luxurious home of the *Begum Mahal*. As a token of his grief for her the Emperor has perpetuated his tears in the marble structure. Whatever the Emperor had done for his beloved wife, nobody can ever dream of doing. The *Taj-Mahal* of Agra is simply unique and without a parallel on the face of the earth.

FINIS.





